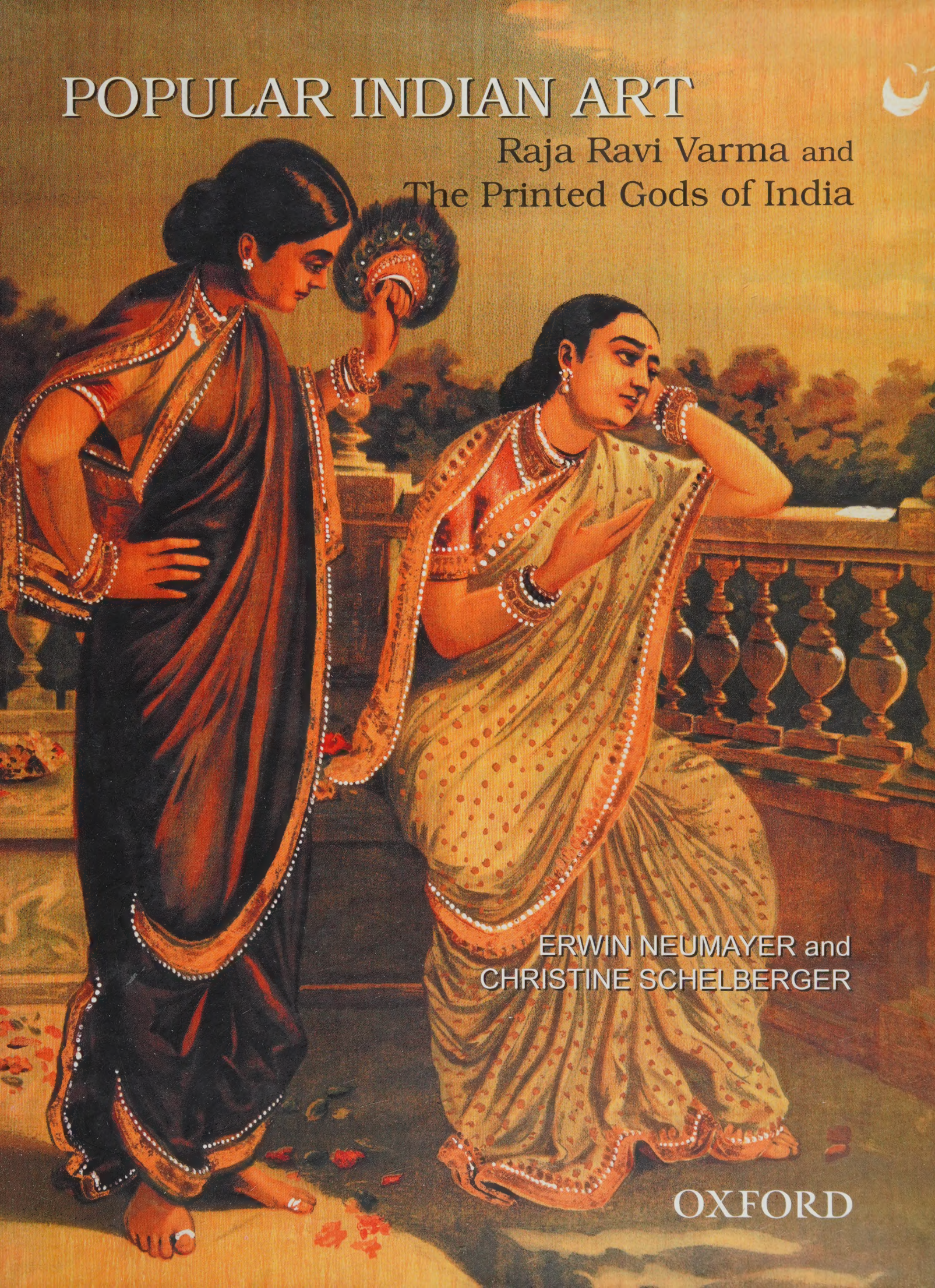
# POPULAR INDIAN ART

## Raja Ravi Varma and The Printed Gods of India



ERWIN NEUMAYER and
CHRISTINE SCHELBERGER

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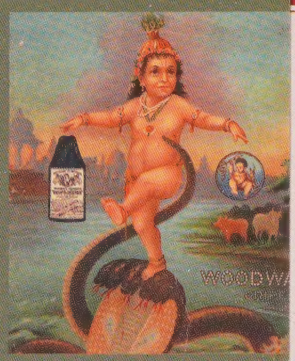
## POPULAR INDIAN ART

*Raja Ravi Varma and the Printed Gods of India*

This lavishly illustrated book traces the evolution of printing oleographs (display prints) in India, beginning with the establishment of the Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press in Mumbai at the end of the nineteenth century. The authors assemble a large number of popular Indian prints from their rare and extensive collection, the only one of its kind available for this period.

Raja Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran (1848–1906), an aristocrat from Travancore by birth and a renowned artist, almost single-handedly created a revolution in modern Indian aesthetics with the establishment of the Ravi Varma Press. His paintings of gods and goddesses, epic heroes and heroines, virtually defined the new pan-Indian iconography. Using German printers and high-speed steam driven presses, Ravi Varma published millions of copies of these famous paintings as well as other religious icons. The pictures were also used to advertise goods and services, as indeed, for political propaganda, where heroes, gods, and national leaders merged into each other. The prints became the most influential medium of visual communication in what was then a socially and culturally fragmented Indian society.



Art historians of the early twentieth century discarded this oleographic 'art' as another school of hybrid kitsch which made a travesty of Indian aesthetic and spiritual values. This of course did not affect its popularity, since it had given Indian mythology a form that had become

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ERWIN NEUMAYER
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# Acknowledgements

This book is really the outcome of the many years of research we devoted to a project on the popular arts of India, which began with a biography of Raja Ravi Varma, followed by an edition of his brother and co-worker's diary, and the collection of visual and written records of both artists, all of which still await publication. In a purely personal (and subjective) endeavour to understand the evolution of popular Indian aesthetics, our work gradually led to an exploration of the industrial history of the early litho presses and several other related subjects on popular Indian art.

It was during our exhibition on 'Oleographed Gods' that the Oxford University Press, New Delhi, expressed a general interest in publishing a book on the subject, thereby infusing great impetus and urgency into our decision to eventually put together a volume that would present the glossier side of our research. We hope that this book will generate a wider and deeper interest in the less picturesque theme of the social and political implications of 'popular art'. To not venture beyond the glossy surface of the prints dealt with here would be to lose sight of the fascinating and significant, though manipulative, role of the visual media in the long run.

We are indebted to a large number of people who helped us during our research in India, Great Britain, and Austria. In India, we are indebted to the various branches of the Kilimanoor and Mavelikara families who, as heirs to the estate of Ravi Varma, granted us permission to scan old photographs, paintings, and other memorabilia; to K.K. Varma in Chennai; R. Kerala Varma, R.K. Varma, M.K. Varma, and M.K. Udaya Varma in Kilimanoor; Gayathri Varma and Satheesan Thampuran in Ernakulam; Saraswati Varma and R. Parthasarathi Varma in Mavelikara. Our special thanks to Dr R.P. Raja, Dr R.S. Prasad, Kizzakke Madan Govind Nair, and to the chief archivist of the Thiruvananthapuram State Archives, Dr Madhu Devan Nayyar, for opening up to us the historical treasures of the archives; to the late Dr Peter Sahu of Malavli, the heir to the estate of Fritz Schleicher, and his uncle, the late Mahendra Singh, for information they so generously provided on the Ravi Varma Press (it is unfortunate that both should have passed away so soon after the

completion of our research at the Press); to K.C. Subramanyan in Shantiniketan, with whom we were able to have many fruitful interactions; to Nilima and Ghulam Sheikh in Vadodara; and to Geeta Kapoor, Vivan Sundaram, and Patricia Uberoi in New Delhi.

Our work on popular art would not have come to fruition without our long discussions with Mona Ray and Amitava Das in Delhi; Amit Sengupta and Arputharani Sengupta in Kolkata and Chennai; and Shipra and Jogen Chowdhury who have always been accessible, no matter where they have lived over the past thirty years or so. Special thanks to Partha Mitter in Sussex, who provided us with important documents on Ravi Varma; and to Jo Bauer, a friend and passionate stone printer who educated us on the finer problems of nineteenth-century printing. He literally took us by the hand to show us some of the original yet extant oleographic presses that have been maintained and kept in working order by collectors of vintage printing presses in Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. Some of them have even set these up in their living rooms as objects of their passion.

And last but not the least, we also thank Ilse Weber who, as on so many earlier occasions, helped us brush up our English version of the text; Tomas Müller and Manfred C. Kaufmann who helped us with the computer; and Nikita Gill, in Delhi, for smoothening the rough edges of a complex manuscript.

Erwin Neumayer
Christine Schelberger

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# Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, a printing industry entirely devoted to the production of pictures of gods, goddesses, and mythological themes was established in India. These cheap mass-produced pictures soon became the most influential medium of visual communication of the then socially and culturally fragmented Indian society. The pictures were treated not only as religious icons but soon become a medium for the advertisement of goods and services, and subsequently, for political propaganda as well.

The most important picture-printing press at this time was pioneered by the famous Indian painter, Raja Ravi Varma Koil Thampuran (1848–1906). In his Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press, millions and millions of copies of his famous paintings as well as other religious icons were published. Ravi Varma had, at the time he founded his press in 1894, already acquired legendary status as an art personality. Although a freelance artist, he was able to elevate the status of his work to heights never before known in Indian art.

He was an aristocrat by birth, hailing from one of the courtly families of Travancore, but his accomplishments as a painter far eclipsed his high social standing. His works commanded huge remuneration, which came not only in the form of money but also as expensive gifts: elephants, robes of honour, jewellery, and purses of gold from the nobility, reminiscent of a bygone era that had ceased to exist. By now, railways criss-crossed the subcontinent, and the telegraph had dwarfed distances. In this world of increasing global interdependence, Ravi Varma's art was inspired by many sources: the most obvious were European book illustrations, poster advertisements, and labels of pre-packaged European merchandise adorned for oriental markets, with exotic designs and illustrations. The strongest influence was that of cheap German oleographs or chromolithographic prints that had, since the mid-nineteenth century, flooded markets all over the world.

Stylistically, Ravi Varma's prints are fascinating reinterpretations of European orientalism by an oriental who laid the foundations of a

pan-Indian 'Hindu' iconography. These cheap, mass-produced icons were the models for the pictorial aesthetics of a new India—the religious as well as the profane. Any other visual medium that followed had to adhere to the canons set by them.

It was not long before political movements took advantage of the popularity of these prints, as did the national film industry. The so-called Indian 'mythologicals' that were so popular during the formative years of Indian cinema were little more than animated Ravi Varma prints. This, however, was at the beginning of the twentieth century. The fact that the TV mythological soaps of the end of the century continued virtually the same aesthetic, requires a deeper examination of the politico-religious underpinnings of the Indian mass media.

Although millions of these pictures were printed in the early presses in India, easy availability and low cost soon diminished their initial status. As the prints lost their status as 'art' and won popular acceptance, they lost the connoisseurs' attention and became consumer goods. Few made it to systematic collections, never being viewed as 'serious' art, their ideological and sociological significance as India's first unifying visual medium of communication receiving scant recognition.

Art historians of the early twentieth century dismissed Ravi Varma's prints as just another school of hybrid kitsch, devoid of Indian sentiments, a mockery of the Indian spiritual ethos, and a travesty of Indian aesthetic values in general. This of course did not affect the popularity of these pictures which had by then given Indian mythology an imagery and a form that had become deeply entrenched in the subconscious of the 'Hindu' mind, and that was far beyond the reach and capacity of art history or art critics. Only in recent times have sociologists and art historians begun to take a fresh look at the origins of this popular medium against the background of the massive utilization of this art form by chauvinistic political movements for purposes of political canvassing.

The importance of visual media in India has to be understood against the backdrop of the large non-reading population that only it can access, and preferably in conjunction with local languages (the size of the national film industry, the largest in the world, is therefore not surprising!). Yet, no systematic and complete collection of this art form exists, and never will: the oeuvre is too large, and the material too difficult to maintain. Research into the origins and development of this media must often rely on rather unsystematic collections that reflect the aesthetic fancies of the collectors, or their whimsical preoccupation with certain themes. Fortunately, however, the number of collectors exhibiting their treasure, and also writing about it, is on the rise, and it is not surprising that most of them are based outside India, where preservation is easier on account of the climatic conditions. To compound the problem of research, this art form does not receive any support. Like an animate object of beauty taken for granted, it continues to flourish

ON THE HEIGHTS OF SIMLA.
"I am the Incarnation of Saraswati—i—i—i!
And all should worship me—e—e—e!"
Me—e—e—e!
Me—e—e—e!
Me—e—e—e!
[Lord Curzon gave a farewell address at Simla on Wednesday last (Sept. 28) at the Conference of the Directors of Public Instruction, in which he reviewed the incidents of the Campaign of Education during the last seven years.]

Plate 1 On the Heights of Simla; Cartoon from the *Hindi Punch*, 1905.

Lord Curzon lampooned as Sarasvati on the occasion of his farewell address held at the Conference of the Directors of Public Instruction. Ravi Varma's prints were extremely popular and were used by generations of Indian cartoonists.

*facing page*

Sarasvati is the goddess of music and learning, and her *vahana* is the swan. Ravi Varma rendered her as the tutelary deity of the British educational system in India, where he changed her vahana from the traditional swan to the peacock.

Plate 2 Sarasvati; Oleograph, 1900; Painting by Ravi Varma, 1893. (*see also* Plates 45–6).

and decay with seasons. Vintage prints have lately become a commodity in the antique market, but here too exists the problem of maintenance. Some of these prints, which were fortunate to have made it behind glass for a hundred years in the premises of a shop or a family home, crumble at the very touch of a salesman or buyer.

The examples in this book are from the collection of the authors who tracked down a substantial number of these prints in the warehouses of traditional picture-framing shops by sifting through old stocks beneath which even older prints lay buried. The quality of these prints is uneven, given their chequered struggle for survival. Many of them are surprisingly still in good condition, their colours still vivid, but in the case of others, the colours have changed to a bluish hue as insects and humidity have taken their toll.

Since the core of our collection lies here, this book deals more with the prints from the earlier period, that is, roughly, the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1950s. We have tried to provide an overall view of the medium from the beginning: the ways in which it was employed in the struggle for independence, to diffuse nationalistic feelings; in political propaganda; and in the representation of Indian mythology. We are aware that the oeuvre of oleographic prints in India is too vast to cover in a single book. Several genres of popular prints have hardly been touched upon in this book, like the genre of cityscape, alpine landscape (one of the typical genres of Indian calendars), mother and child, women fetching water, India's Five Year Plans—so well documented in Patricia Uberoi's work on the portrayal of women in calendars (Uberoi 2000), birds, animals, and, of course, heroes and heroines from Indian films. These are all facets of the pictured social reality of India.

# The Magic Stone

Although the technology for printing oleographs came from outside India, the special form of visual communication set in motion by it is an Indian phenomenon that suddenly found its home in this country, like a colourful and exotic migratory bird comfortably taking to its new surroundings. Oleography as an art form made its way to India a little over a hundred years ago, where it thrived and grew according to its own laws and requirements. It is not as if this art form had no predecessors in other parts of the world: it had to, as the technology for it was imported in entirety. However, in India it grew in consonance with the specific requirements of a nation in the making; and when it had grown, both the nation and the medium began sharing a symbiotic relationship, each drawing strength from the other.

It is a difficult task to trace the beginnings and trajectory of this art form in India because its omnipresence in the country renders its contours virtually invisible; paradoxically, it is just taken for granted as a given. Even the terminology for these prints is difficult to pin down. 'Calendar art' is a misnomer as the Indian calendar is essentially a phenomenon of the 1930s, by which time this art was almost forty years old. 'God posters' and 'popular prints' are also terms much used in present-day studies, although 'gods' represents only one, albeit important, category of these 'posters', while 'popular prints' smacks of condescension. The term 'display prints' is, on the other hand, somewhat more accurate since it is descriptive of the mechanical method of production and the purpose for which it was produced. However, 'chromolithographs' and 'oleographs' are technical terms with which even printers are no longer familiar.

Let us first view the technological side of the picture-printing trade in order to understand the term 'oleography', and to do so, let us begin with the German myth that underlies the invention of lithography.

One day, a washerwoman went to a German inventor's apartment to collect his laundry. With no slip of paper ready at hand, and probably preoccupied with other matters, the inventor scribbled the items with soot-ink on a block of stone. An ardent experimenter in quest of an inexpensive method to publish his plays (for he was also a playwright), the

inventor treated the laundry note with acid and, almost miraculously, the script remained as relief.

It was no ordinary piece of stone that the German inventor used: it was white limestone schist formed a hundred million years ago, during the Jurassic period, in the Mühl Valley near Solnhofen, not far from the river Danube in Bavaria. Today we know a great deal about the natural history of this region, once a stretch of the swampy subtropical coastline of Thaetis, the primeval ocean that once surrounded the earth. Fossilized animals and plants, wonderfully preserved down to the last detail, have been discovered embedded in this stone: wings of dragonflies as clear as they are in photographs, as are footprints of the smallest crabs and bodies of dolphin-sized saurian. Also found here is perhaps the most famous of all fossils, the skeleton and feathers of the bird-size *Archaeopteryx lithographica*, a winged saurian, encased in the stone with a twisted head and wings, and feathers all around, like a fallen angel.

This stone from Solnhofen has long been quarried. Its bands of equal thickness make it easy to handle, and its creamy colour with fine enclosures in a pinkish shade give to it the sheen of banded marble. Being almost pure limestone of perfect homogeneity, it was a much sought-after building material for floorings and tiles in the early days. Transport was easy along the Danube, where the stone was loaded in bulk on to wooden rafts, which floated down the river to Vienna, where it was unloaded and sold. For centuries, local craftsmen etched into its surface inscriptions, mythological scenes, and figures of saints to be set up as gravestones, or icons from the walls of chapels.

To return to our inventor: It was the year 1796 or thereabout when this unsuccessful playwright, in search of a method to publish his unsuccessful plays, had lost whatever he had. His name was Aloys Senefelder, and he was born in 1771 in Prague. His father was an actor who was somehow able to educate his bright son. Aloys Senefelder was unable to complete his study of law in Bavaria for lack of resources after his father's death. He failed as a playwright and in all manners of trade, one of which was managing a printing press. He must have been a stubborn and determined character, for when he learned about a local technique to produce relief pictures and inscriptions for gravestones and churches, he began experimenting with the locally available stone. It was not long before he—like his gravestone-producing predecessors from the Middle Ages—succeeded in 'etching' his laundry bill. With the etched stone he was able to print as from a woodblock; but that was scarcely a momentous development for printing, and it was certainly not, in a strict sense, 'lithography'.

Senefelder continued experimenting, finding himself financiers from the world of theatre and music, and by 1797–8 he had managed to refine the printing process known as 'lithography', but which he himself called 'chemical printing'. His success was nothing short of a revolution

Aloys Senefelder (1771–1834), in the last year of his life; Portrait by F. Hanfstaengel (1801–77), one of the early publishers of popular lithographic prints in Bavaria.

Plate 3

in printing. He was able to manipulate the Solnhofener schist in such a way that the printing ink applied on the polished surface adhered to only those parts of the stone on which the desired design had been drawn. The principle is quite simple: The microscopic pores that cover the designed area of this fine-grained Jurassic limestone absorb the fat from the drawing chalk or ink applied on it, and close after application. A succession of chemical processes make these marks fully receptive to grease and fully resistant to water. The unmarked parts of the stone, on the other hand, remain receptive to water and, therefore, resistant to grease. The stone is then dampened, affecting only the non-printing areas, and a roller charged with greasy printing ink is passed over its surface. The ink remains on the roller during its contact with the damp parts of the stone, but is transferred from the roller onto the stone wherever it encounters grease. The image is thus transferred, in ink, on the surface of the flat stone. In the traditional lithographic press, paper is laid on the stone, with sufficient backing material and a thin sheet of metal above it, and the entire package is passed on runners under a bar of wood covered in leather known as the scraper (Gascoigne 1986: ch. 1c). The paper, when removed from the stone, has the design imprinted

on its surface as a mirror image. This process can be replicated indefinitely, and the stone can be used repeatedly for new designs by polishing off the old drawing from its surface.

In his 'chemical printing' process, Senefelder had finally discovered an inexpensive method of printing. He travelled to European capitals to secure patent rights, and also to find sponsors for his invention. Europe, at that time, was ravaged by the Napoleonic wars, but Senefelder's invention was embraced by friend and foe alike. He himself envisaged his invention being used to print theatre literature and musical scores which, until then, were either copied by hand or by using the forbiddingly expensive method of etching copper plates. At the time it was high noon for the European music theatre, and since every petty nobleman maintained an orchestra, printing scores meant big business. Senefelder introduced London to lithography in 1801 and received the sole privilege of employing this technique throughout Britain for a period of fifteen years. He also shared his patent with the German publisher Johann Anton Andre, who, besides holding the copyright for the music of Mozart, was a shrewd businessman. When the patent right ran out, Senefelder translated his tractate *Vollständiges Lehrbuch der Steindruckerey* (1818) into English, entitled *A Complete Course of Lithography* and published it in London in 1819. By this time, of course, lithography had established itself in all European cities.

The credit for first introducing lithography in India goes to a French resident of Kolkata, de Savighnac, who learnt of this printing process from Senefelder's treatise on lithography. De Savighnac built his own makeshift press, which he ran with the help of another French resident of Kolkata, the painter Jean-Jacques Belnos. As early as 1822, de Savighnac received a commission to print a portrait of Warren Hastings based on a painting by George Chinnery, who was in India between 1802 and 1825; and to pay for this, a subscription of one gold *mohur* per copy was collected—no mean price for a portrait of the marquis! Besides, as the *Calcutta Journal* of 15 October 1822 mentions: '... he has also done a Head of the celebrated Brahmin and Unitarian Christian, Ram Mohun Roy....' De Savighnac was also instrumental in the foundation of the litho-press of the Asiatic Society from which originated many of the illustrations in the society's proceedings. The press of the Asiatic Society, which started work in 1826, produced many scientific works on natural history and other subjects. One of the still extant works is a catalogue of a collection donated to the society, in which figures a lithographed view of the society's premises and a portrait of its founder, William Jones.

There is another claimant for the introduction of lithography to Kolkata: a medical practitioner by the name of Dr I.N. Rind, who was on leave and visiting London in 1821, during the time Senefelder's lithographic press was gaining popularity there. When he returned to Kolkata in 1822, he was carrying a litho-press as part of his luggage. In due

course, and with some effort, Rind was able to draw the government's attention to this new method of printing, leading to the establishment of the Government Lithographic Press in 1826, of which he was appointed the superintendent. He trained several workers who went on to man the newly established presses in Mumbai and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, de Savighnac joined up with the French portrait painter Jean-Jacques Belnos, and together they worked their own press in a small way, principally to reproduce drawings by Belnos, and later, also the works of his wife, of which the most famous was a widely-circulated portfolio entitled *Twenty Four Plates Illustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal—Drawn on the Stone by A. Colin, from Sketches by Mrs Belnos* (Ray 1979).

Another early centre of lithographic printing was Patna, where a government servant, Charles D'Oyly, on an assignment as an opium agent and later as a commercial resident, introduced lithography in order to pursue his own prolific artistic interests, which could have comfortably formed part of Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*. D'Oyly's industriousness causes one to wonder how this versatile genius found time to discharge his administrative responsibilities. He founded an active amateur art society which at some point changed its already colourful name, 'Sons of Art in Patna', to 'The United Patna and Gaya Society, or Behar School of Athens'; and one of the statutes of this society was the 'Promotion of Arts and Science for the Circulation of Fun and Merriment of all Descriptions'. He also published the output of these merry 'Athenians' in his periodical, *Behar Amateur Lithographic Scrapbook* (1828–30), and lithographed several books using his drawings: *The Feathered Game of Hindostan* (1828), *Oriental Ornithology* (1829), *Indian Sports* (1829), *Costumes of India* (1830), *Sketches of the New Road in a Journey from Calcutta to Gayah* (1830), and (posthumously) *Lithographed Views of Calcutta and its Environs* (1848), to name a few.

By this time lithography was well established in India. It not only accelerated the circulation of written works in colloquial languages and scripts, but also generated a rich harvest of cheap editions of popular religious and mythological texts illustrated with lithographs. Speaking of continuities, it is this class of literature that is to be found today in a virtually identical form at newspaper and footpath stalls all over India. Although no longer lithographed, these books maintain the ancient form of manuscripts, where the pages were turned upwards.

With the coming of the railway, there was a huge rise in the requirement for forms and vouchers. At all railway head-offices large lithographic workshops were established, producing stationery and all other manner of printed material in huge quantities. This not only gave rise to the peculiar 'paperwork' bureaucratization for which the British empire is renowned, but also resulted in the availability of a continuous stream of cheap waste paper for secondary use. A whole industry of local

Plate 4 Interior of a lithographic printing studio around 1900; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

printing and other cottage crafts grew around this cheap raw material. With the spread of lithography the quantity of litho stones exported from Solnhofen, the only source of this material in the world, soared. For centuries this stone had been used as cheap bulk for log rafts floating down the Danube, and had been sold off along with the wood and other merchandise downstream in Vienna, where palaces and monasteries still boast of beautiful flooring, once constructed from material quarried from Solnhofen.

Lithography thus created a new demand for high quality, perfectly homogenous stones that had to be carefully mined and handled. These were classed in several categories. The first and most expensive of these, called 'American', was dark grey in colour, and still remains the first choice of many studio artists. It is rare, which in all probability accounts for its high price. Another variety of white stone of medium quality, called 'India', was exported in huge quantities to India right up to the 1950s, after which lithography was replaced by offset printing. Let us, however, keep to the 1850s. Lithography had by now permeated many spheres of Indian society, mostly in the form of low-cost printing, almanacs, and penny copies, often reworked by hand. There was also another class of printing that flourished, although the reason for its popularity remains unclear given that the production process was by no means simple. This was the printing with wooden blocks. It appears that the pre-industrial organization of cottage

(Left) A man is preparing the stone surface by rubbing two litho stones against each other.

(Centre) A person is preparing a colour stone by separating the colours by hand.

(Right) A printer rolls colour on to a stone to test it on a small hand-driven press before placing it into the speed press.

(Background) A man feeds paper into a cylinder speed press.

industries, with their large force of bonded labour, stood in the way of modern methods of production. Woodblock printing methods were however modernized: quite early in the nineteenth century, Kolkata printers adopted the method of producing galvanic copies from woodblocks or other intaglio models in wax or plaster of Paris, which could then be used in letterpress printing. The advantage of such blocks was that they made much larger print-runs possible, and several such blocks could be made and printed at the same time for particularly large jobs. While a wooden block would only last for a few hundred impressions, blocks with galvanized linings could be used to print several thousand impressions before wearing out, and then the woodblock could again be galvanized and yield perfect impressions. That this was indeed the case in practice is testified by the screw-head impressions in many of the Battala prints.

In Europe at that time, the central concern in printing was speed. The letterpress which, since its invention in the mid-fifteenth century, had remained virtually unchanged, was now replaced by the rotary press. The original printing press, as used by Johannes Gutenberg in AD 1439, was modelled upon a winepress, which has a central screw-spindle that exerts vertical pressure to squeeze the juice out of grapes. In this adaptation of the printing press, the mechanism was used to press the tinted fonts against paper. The process of tightening and releasing the pressure for each new sheet to be impressed was cumbersome and time consuming, and was one of the technical barriers in the mass production of books. However, these technical limitations were overcome by the introduction of rotary presses, in which the tinting of fonts as well as the impression on paper was brought about by the continuous movement of rollers. The technological invention for the letterpress had been accomplished in the first half of the nineteenth century, but technological inventions do not come without social adaptations, reorientations, and repercussions. Large printing establishments with long rows of hand- and foot-driven presses with their large workforce of children, besides the trained staff, were now reorganized with a smaller number of high-speed presses driven by steam. A tremendous rise in printing capacity accompanied the reduction of trained labour. These developments gained much impetus from the public demand for freedom of speech and freedom of the press, both of which were central to the Revolution of 1848 in Europe. New printing processes demanded uniform and standardized raw material like paper and ink. Soon, factories would produce these, and machine-made wood-pulp paper would replace paper milled from textile waste. The market for books and papers was expanding rapidly, influencing in turn, the demand for illustrations.

Around this time, a certain Georg Sigl from Vienna, whose principal engineering concerns were railway machines, developed a new type of printing press for lithography, which dispensed with the cumbersome scraper. He set up the litho stone on a moveable stone bed that was

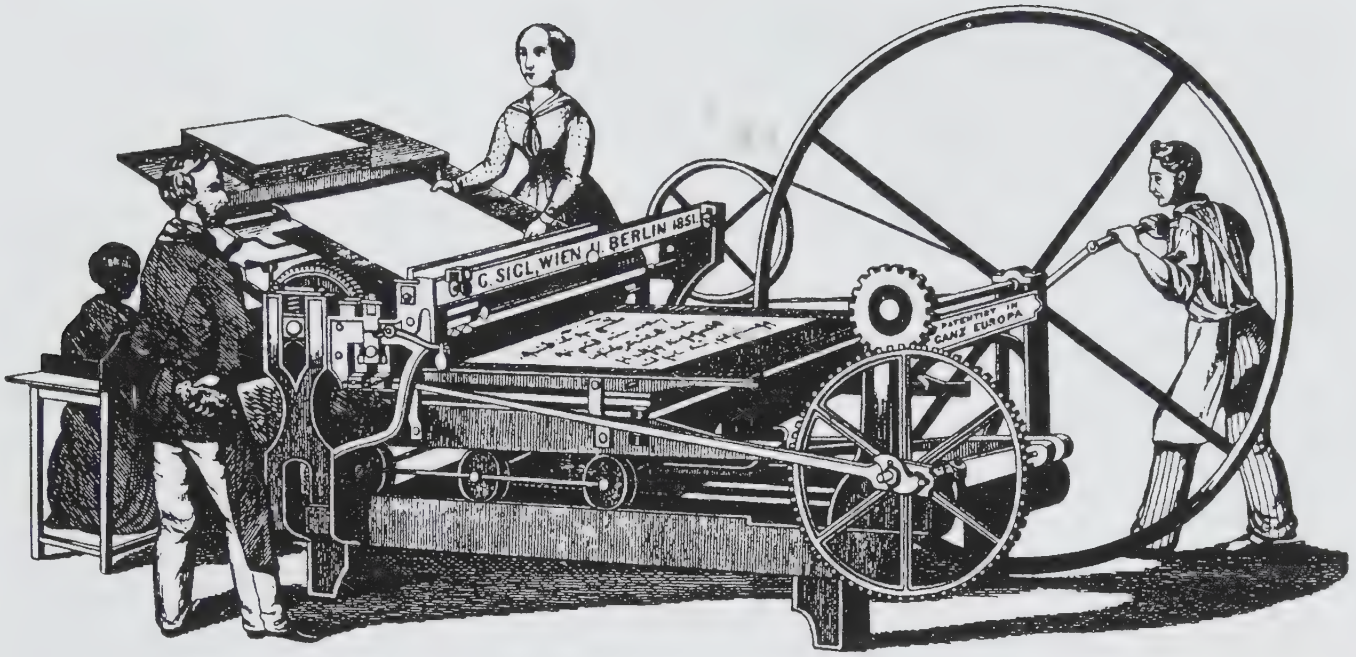


Plate 5 Georg Sigl's lithographic speed press of 1851; Woodblock print, 1851 .

The print is an advertisement for the lithographic speed press invented, in Vienna, by Georg Sigl in 1851. The press is shown driven by an apprentice, while the paper is fed and received by women. This indicates easy traction performed by cheap labour at a time when child labour accounted for much of the workforce in the printing industry. Soon, however, the invention of the cylinder press, now powered by steam, made it possible to dispense with manual labour, rendering the industrial production of lithographic pictures more viable.

mechanically pulled like a railway wagon under a cylinder that both applied pressure and fed the paper as the stone moved beneath it. The paper took the impression from the stone it was pressed upon. A mechanism at the end of the track re-tinted the stone and thus readied it for the next impression. These printing presses were large and heavy machines, driven by transmission belts set in motion by steam. Five to six metres long and several metres high, the machines had cogwheels and bearings set in cast iron and steel frames (*see* Plate 5). The cogwheels and other sophisticated mechanical devices co-ordinated all movement. These machines were capable of producing 500 to 800 impressions per hour, which meant an increase in the volume of production by 1000 per cent per day. Production costs plummeted; trained printers and mechanics could supervise one or two machines at a time, while child or female labour could be exploited for the remaining jobs, such as feeding the paper, receiving the printed sheets, or sponging the stone with water. However, the one drawback in employing these machines was the initial capital outlay. They cost as much as a city house, and their size was indeed much larger than the small workshops could ever accommodate. To recoup their capital investment the proprietors would have had to keep them in operation round the clock to their full capacity.

In Germany, a large printing industry emerged in response to the Revolution of 1848 and the liberalization of the press. The tremendous growth of railways, postal services, banking, and the stock market demanded a steady stream of printed paper. Maps, paper money, advertisements, stock-holder certificates, security papers, were produced by lithographic techniques, often in combination with other printing

methods, to counter forging attempts. The print industry in Germany and Austria had the advantage of established auxiliary industries, such as paper mills producing a new variety of paper made from wood pulp, the raw material for which came from the apparently inexhaustible forests of Bavaria and Bohemia. Its installed capacity was huge, and three-fourths of the art prints were for export, particularly to Britain and America. How much of that material came to India, in all probability via Britain, has yet to be studied.

The printing industry needs to be understood as a form of mass communication that was as influential as is satellite TV today. The world of pictures was transported across national boundaries regardless of the buyers' requirements; their choice was restricted to a predetermined repertoire from which they could purchase whatever caught their fancy. And all was well with the sellers so long as the buyers were in a position to pay. The products of this industry were a wide variety of icons that served the gods in heaven as well as the general business. These prints of gods, saints, virgins, kings, and queens introduced a new aspect—colour—to a world of visuals that had, until then, been confined to shades of black and white. True, the folk arts excelled in colourful applications and adornments, but such exuberance was reserved for special occasions and for festivals only. Suddenly, colourful prints enlivened the quarters of the poor just as paintings had adorned the homes of the aristocrats and bourgeoisie for centuries. The dramatic impact of these prints was tremendous: the blood oozing from the wounds of the saints looked more real than ever before; the virgin could now be painted with her bleeding heart; and the expression on the faces of the tzars and kings became more benevolent. This was the time of display prints!

Senefelder had already attempted to produce coloured prints. He had, in *A Complete Course of Lithography*, theoretically formulated the method for blending prime colours of a translucent nature to arrive at a true colour print. However, the problem was that until the invention of high-speed printing machines his method was too expensive to be viable, and was used only in studio printing. Once high-speed printing machines became available the concept of colour lithography became simpler: apply as many colours as there are on the picture to be printed, prepare as many stones as there are colours, and print them in succession. For this, the individual colours on the original had to be defined by contour lines (*see* Plate 33), which were then transferred to stones. The stones were allocated to separate colours, all of which were printed on a single sheet of paper in succession, ensuring exact control of registration, so that every colour sat exactly where it should. Of course, what appears to be a simple process required great expertise, and the task of separating colours was undertaken by skilled master craftsmen who jealously guarded the secrets of their craft. The few surviving litho printers, interviewed in the course of the study by the authors, relate

frightening tales about the trials of their apprenticeship: of how they were laced with bruises, and boxed in the ears or on the head, while little instruction was imparted to them about the secrets of colour separation.

Colour prints were marketed under many different terms, each more colourful than the other: oleograph, chromo-lithograph, colour-lithograph, oil-print, and the like. Technically, they mean the same thing, but the terms are overlaid with hierarchical connotations. An oleograph refers to a cheap mass-produced print as does a chromo-lithograph; but a colour-lithograph of, say, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, is understood as a print of unquestionable high art. The term 'oleograph' or 'oil-print' ('Öldrucke', in German) hints at what the cheap prints aspired to, masquerading as oil paintings akin to those displayed in the palaces of the aristocracy; and to extend this mimicry, some of the prints were even impressed with a canvas-like veneer.

The Indian lithographers relied heavily on the stipple technique, where the image is transferred onto the stone in a virtually pointillist fashion. It is difficult to understand why the method of drawing with chalk was almost abandoned in favour of the stipple method. Only some of the art-school lithographs from Kolkata and some of the early prints from the Ravi Varma Press reveal the chalky treatment of lines (*see* Plates 14–16, 42, 71–2, 134). It appears as if Indian consumers demanded clear and flat contours of unbroken hue. If the Ravi Varma Press and a few other early presses saw to a general high standard of printing, smaller presses had to economize and slash prices by producing as many impressions as possible from a single stone. (A single stone can take no more than 5000 impressions, following which the prints become blurred, and the stone needs to either be rejuvenated or replaced by a new one.) Prints of low quality, where either the registration of the individual colours was not properly aligned, or where the image was blurred on account of high print-runs, were 'corrected' with overprinted contour lines in black stipples. Besides, in the absence of copyright laws, fast-moving prints were scavenged by fly-by-night producers who reproduced images in a limited range of colours and backgrounds.

The oleographs came in a wide range of sizes, although they almost never exceeded 70 x 50 cm in size, and indeed the earliest prints were of that size. A majority of the prints came in two sizes—50 x 36 cm and 35 x 25 cm. The format was determined by the size of the stone, and although larger stones were available, they were too unwieldy given that they weighed several hundred kilos.

These technical stipulations made industrial lithography the ideal medium for mass printing. While centrally produced commercial prints—either for packaging, advertising goods, or for display—flooded the national market, establishing a pan-Indian iconography, they pushed local mythological traditions, and the iconography associated with them, to the periphery. Indeed, this 'industrial colonialism' of the visual media

(brought about by the visual power of the industrialized image) virtually exterminated the gods and goddesses of many a minor tradition.

Already, by the end of the nineteenth century, a number of methods had been devised to print from etched zinc plates. One popular method was the duo print, in which a half-tone plate was printed with different grains in two colours, imparting to it a sense of depth and a photographic quality. Nonetheless, the plates printed employing these methods were unable to remotely match the brightness and titillating qualities of the oleographs. It was only in the 1920s that a sizeable number of half-tone prints entered the market. Since these prints carried the name of Karachi Prints, it is likely that this technique was first pioneered by the firm, Brijbasi & Sons, which was founded in 1922 in Karachi, and which distributed widely across western India. The firm moved to Mathura after Independence and is still one of the major printing and distributing firms in the Indian display-print business.

Most half-tone prints are small pictures printed on a white sheet of 39 x 25 cm, the print in the centre never exceeding 20 x 15 cm in size. The advantage of these prints was that they could be produced on the letterpress. Small treadle presses of the famous Heidelberger system were common in every Indian backyard, and many small print shops relied on these to churn out half-tone prints, although, as mentioned earlier, these were no match for the oleographs which came in bright colours and with a glossy surface. The half-tones, on the other hand, looked more like magazine prints.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century a number of technical innovations modernized the printing process. The most important change was of course the colour transfer of pictures in conjunction with photography. Assisted by a range of colour filters, individual colours could be photographically separated from a picture, speeding up the tedious process of colour separation by hand. A number of grades of prefabricated grids enabled the different shades of a particular colour to be printed in a single impression. The photographic transfer process was introduced in India soon after 1900 by Dadasaheb Phalke (1870–1944), a versatile artist who was to later become the father of national cinema. Phalke was trained in England in printing technology, and had set up his own studio in Malavli that not only worked for the Ravi Varma Press, but also for other printers who set up shop in the area. However, the lithographic printing process itself remained unchallenged. No other method of printing could create such clear surfaces and unbroken colours. Till the 1950s, oleographs were produced in very much the same way as when Ravi Varma imported the first high-speed lithographic presses. What has changed since then are the image- and photo-litho transfer methods. After 1960 almost all the lithographic speed presses were phased out. In Sivakasi, the printing centre in the south where the calendar business was concentrated, two-colour offset machines were installed,

and shortly thereafter four-colour high-speed presses from the German Democratic Republic. That was the position of technology when we conducted our research at the presses and ateliers of Sivakasi in the late 1980s.

The calendar print has now achieved a place of permanence as a distinct cultural entity in India. It has played a major role in the formation of modern Indian aesthetics, and has been exported overseas as an important segment of the art of modern India. India's calendar art, its offspring—cinema advertisements, as well as many other branches of popular art application are by now an integral part of world art, and are exhibited in museums around the world. Pop stars like Boy George and Michael Jackson have even some of these pictures as visuals on record covers, while the French artists Pierre and Gilles often use calendar aesthetics for their androgynic homoerotic travesties. In India, this art has always been held dear to the hearts of the people, but despised by the urban elite art critics. But even here, rigid boundaries have begun to dissolve as critics are beginning to take a second look at these inexpensive and often whimsically produced prints with their bleeding colours, imperfect registration, and outrageous colour schemes, not to speak of the use of the hierarchies of size, and other artistic features which were originally considered primitive but are now thought to be innovative and modern.

Since the business of urban art is under continuous obligation to create modes and hypes, it has lately begun embracing popular calendar art, by asking artists to work for popular art theme shows. Lately, a highbrow exhibition entitled 'Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai' (Uberoi 2001) was held in Delhi, which sought to celebrate this form of art with its own elite-art additions. It became very clear during the exhibition that the genre of popular art cannot be re-enacted or transplanted into an alien environment, which in this case comprised well-lit galleries, clean surroundings, and high price tags. Remakes of popular art always fall short of the whimsical and interim qualities of the original!

This then is the story of a stone onto which fell angels flying over Jurassic swamps, and in turn gave life to a new genre of influential pictures from the hands of Indian painters.

# The Printed Gods of India

Mechanical reproduction of religious books and icons began quite late in India, and there are many reasons for this. Although the art of stencilling has a long tradition in Indian crafts, particularly in textile printing, the strict social division of craftsmen into castes and guilds made it impossible for technologies to travel freely between different categories of crafts.

The reproduction of religious scripture and icons had traditionally been a monopoly of the priestly class, and it is not surprising that they zealously guarded their trade against any mechanical duplication or reproduction. It was in the colonial settlement along the Malabar Coast of western India, towards the close of the sixteenth century, that Christian missionaries established printing workshops to reproduce religious scriptures. With moveable letters it became possible to print the various Indian scripts in use at the time. However, printing in the vernacular had its own share of problems given the large number of irregular joint letters, and for which several hundred fonts had to be used for each of the many scripts in use. Nonetheless, several translations of Christian texts printed in local languages and scripts became available from the seventeenth century onwards, although it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that a regular printing establishment was set up at Serampore, a former Danish missionary centre near Kolkata. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this enterprise had grown into a large industry, producing Christian literature and other works in many Asian languages and scripts. This large and variegated literature demanded ever-increasing numbers of illustrations. These were initially produced from woodcuts for the more popular books and from steel engravings for the more expensive volumes, and later by lithography. The production of picture blocks was a symbiotic trade catering to the printing industry. Here, craftsmen cut designs according to ordered specifications into woodblocks or metal. Some of these craftsmen were recognized as gifted artists in their line, who prominently signed their wares.

Plate 6 Goddess Lakshmi; Battala woodblock print by Ramdhan Karmakar, Kolkata, 1857–8.

The many different stages and types of work in a printing industry of that size demanded a large and well-trained workforce, which was recruited locally. Several of these local printers established their own workshops where they specialized in producing popular Bengali and other regional literature in the vernacular. Many of the print jobs came from native theatre troupes in the form of theatre advertisements, and there was an ever-increasing demand for almanacs and other material in regional languages from a growing literate and urban population. Many of the local presses were established at Battala, a part of the 'Black Town' where the majority of the local population of Kolkata lived and worked.

Kolkata, founded in 1688 as a trading post, became the capital of the East Indian Company's dominion in 1775. By 1850, the city had grown into an urban sprawl of imperial buildings and private palaces—islands in a sea of squalor and slums. It soon established itself as the largest city in the world—ever expanding, and increasingly swamped by the teeming, impoverished millions trapped in the process of social change, lured to the city by the prospect of employment. Artisans who had worked in their native rural workshops for generations, serving a stable market, flooded the cities. Only a handful was sufficiently able to meet the new demands for quality and design in this new market environment. The products of that period evidence the blending of colonial and traditional values in a truly cosmopolitan symbiosis. To identify the precise direction of stylistic influences during that period is not really feasible given the generous and general blending of styles and designs. Orientalism was re-transported into the Orient from Europe and re-adapted to serve as a model for 'Indian' designs in the cosmopolitan cities of Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, and Patna. This art of the global village was whimsically emulating everything that caught its fancy, never mind which direction it came from.

The many local presses required a range of illustrations for their publications, and these were furnished by block makers. It is a matter of considerable surprise that the makers of these blocks were not the picture makers or wood carvers working for textile manufacturers, but people from a widely divergent caste and occupational background. On the basis of the signatures they occasionally appended to their works, it is known that some among them were Brahmins while others, like ironsmiths, came from lower castes—the highest and the lowest in the hierarchy of Indian social stratification.

In traditional India, trade was determined by caste. Besides performing many other functions, caste also served as an occupational guild, determining the place of its members in a complex web of social interactions: the rigid Us and Them, the Touchables and Untouchables. If a Brahmin chose to engage in a trade fit only for a member of an inferior caste, his social status was reduced to that of the latter. In this context, the fact that the early block makers came from the most divergent of

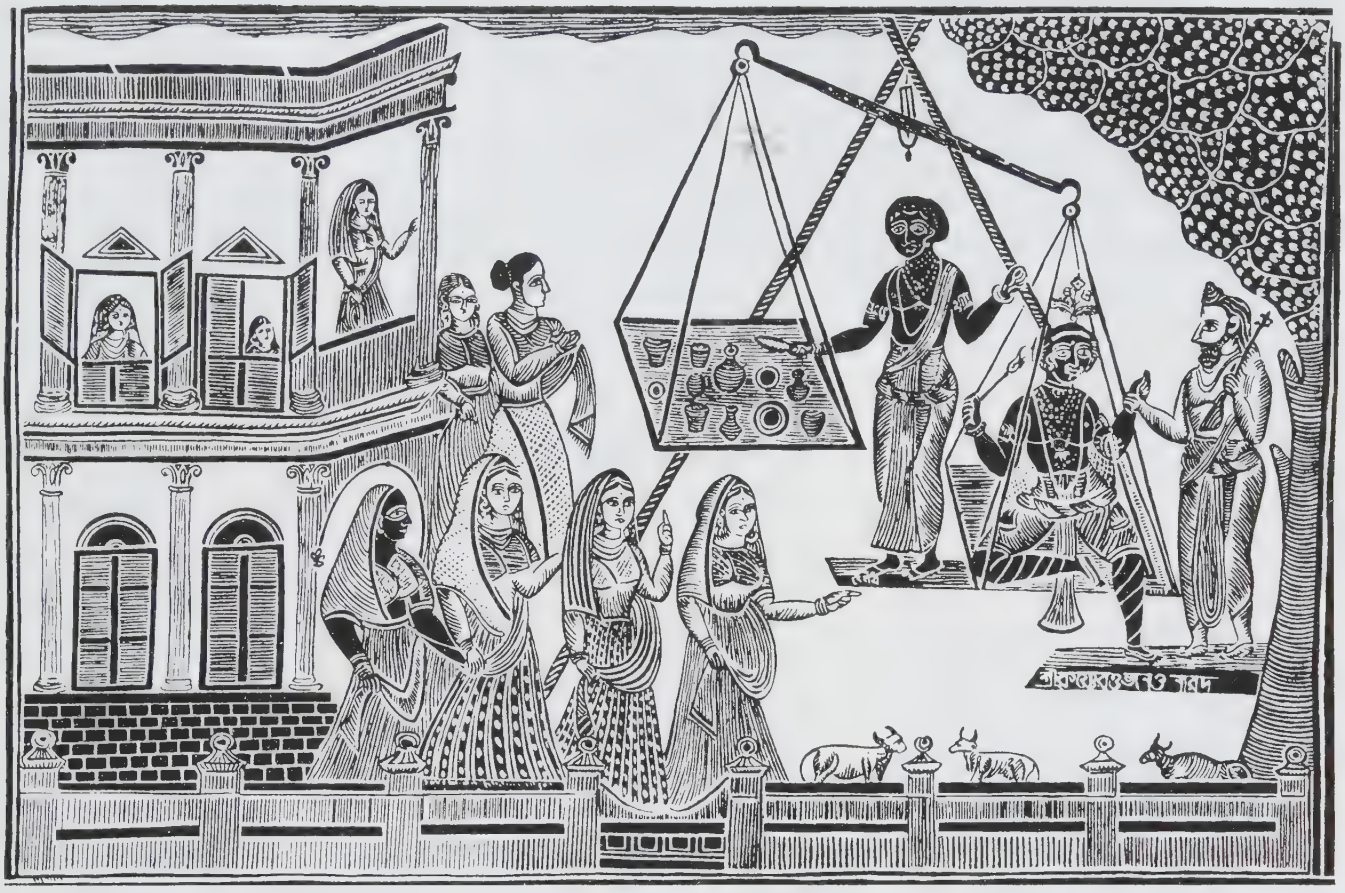

Plate 7 Weighing of Krishna; Battala hand-tinted print, anonymous, *c.*1860.

Krishna on a weighing scale, with Narada (the heavenly singer and herald) on the side. The platform upon which Narada stands, carries an inscription in Bengali, which translates as 'Weighing Krishna'. The classical architecture in the picture is an example of the introduction of modern stylistic elements in traditional themes.

caste backgrounds indicates that traditional social structures were breaking down under the pressure of modern capitalism, and that immigrants to the city were sufficiently dynamic, or desperate, to cast aside age-old caste divisions and prejudices, at least in the printing business. The signed woodblocks are possibly the earliest manifestations of art where the artisan as the artist confronted the new world.

In pictures depicting gods and goddesses clothed in traditional iconography, modern influences—apart from the technique of mechanical reproduction—were confined to the periphery. The depiction of European classical architecture, European interiors with ornate glass chandeliers, and foreign attire—all combine to reveal aspects of the period during which these pictures were drawn and printed. The subject of the picture is placed as if on a proscenium stage, between heavy cord-held curtains. Descending lines and foreshortening with chiaroscuro the density of foregrounds and backgrounds indicate an attempt to adopt a European perspective, although the hierarchy between the central and peripheral figures is better conveyed through their relative size (*see* Plates 7, 9, 13–14).

Such pictures of gods and goddesses and mythological scenes were sold near temples and at pilgrim centres, and also bound into books and almanacs as illustrations. They had to compete with hand-drawn icons

manufactured in assembly-line fashion and sold, likewise, in the vicinity of temples. It was not long before the pictures painted in a locality adjacent to the Kalighat Temple in Kolkata achieved some fame, and became collectors' items. These pictures depicted mythological and profane scenes drawn with sweeping, sure lines. Black contours were accentuated by accompanying brush strokes of bright red, yellow, and blue (*see* Plate 8). The profane scenes depicted animals or household scenes, lampooning the absurd behaviour of city folk attempting to clumsily ape their British overlords in dress and behaviour. The pictures mirrored new times, without taking a moral stance. Interestingly, the artists were lampooning the behaviour of the very class of citizens who were the buyers and collectors of these pictures. The pictures also played with sensual and erotic themes that had never before been the object of 'Public Art'. Erotic, and even pornographic art, had been part of private aristocratic art, but only in the confines of intimate courtly circles.

In the Kalighat paintings we also find depictions of the *babu*s, or anglicized gentry, being entertained or exploited in bordellos by their *bibi*s, or mistresses, dressed in traditional clothes, but with heavy black boots. The babu is depicted as a representative of the new times, in a topsy-turvy world that is a travesty of an infinitely more gracious past. This is of course in consonance with the traditional perception of the progress of history, which is understood to be a sequence of consecutive periods, or *yuga*s (aeons), of diminishing moral virtue till the earth is cleansed by the sword of Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu and rider of a white mare, when moral corruption has reached its zenith, preparing the *tabula rasa* for a new golden age. It goes without saying that 'modern times' were perceived as just such a period of extreme moral degradation, when '... property alone will confer rank, wealth will be the only source of devotion, earth will be venerated only for its mineral treasures, the brahminical thread will constitute a Brahmin ... dishonesty will be the universal means of subsistence ... presumption will be the subterfuge for learning....' (Wilkins 1882: 247).

Sometimes the pictures merely serve as illustrations, in much the same way as woodcut illustrations did in English crime gazettes depicting sensational and gruesome murder cases. One of these cases was the sensational Tarakeshwar murder case of 1873 were Elokeshi, a young woman of sixteen, already married to Nabin Chandra Banerjee, a Brahmin clerk at the Government Printing Press in Kolkata, was seduced by the head priest of the famous Shiva Temple at Tarakeshwar, some thirty-odd kilometres north-west of Kolkata. Since she was still living in her father's house, it is believed that this clandestine affair carried on with the consent of her father and some others in the family. When the young husband expressed a desire to take Elokeshi to his own house, the *mahant* objected, and the drama came to a grisly end when Nabin killed Elokeshi with a fish knife, an indispensable part of every Bengali kitchen (*see* Plates 9–12). The story of Elokeshi, often narrated, spiced with local flavours,

Plate 8 The Courtesan; Kalighat painting, anonymous, *c.*1870.

Plate 9 Lady on an Ornate Bed; Battala woodblock print, anonymous, *c.*1875.

The lady being fanned by her lover is a possible allusion to the Elokeshi affair.

*facing page*

The courtesan leads her *babu* on a leash, occasionally goading him with her sceptre, a rose.

came to epitomize the horrors of modern times, when priests eloped with married women and indulged in forbidden pleasures.

The husband and priest were both sentenced, one for murder, and the other for adultery. Nabin, however, was released under an amnesty granted when— of all dignitaries—the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) visited India. The priest was never as fortunate: it was not long before he became a popular subject of the Kalighat prints, a profusion of which treated him as the epitome of the eternal adulterer, often depicted driving an oil mill like any beast of burden under the whip of a Muslim warden of the gaol. There were also several paintings that lampooned the Vaishnava Brahmin's preaching of non-violence and vegetarianism. Some of these

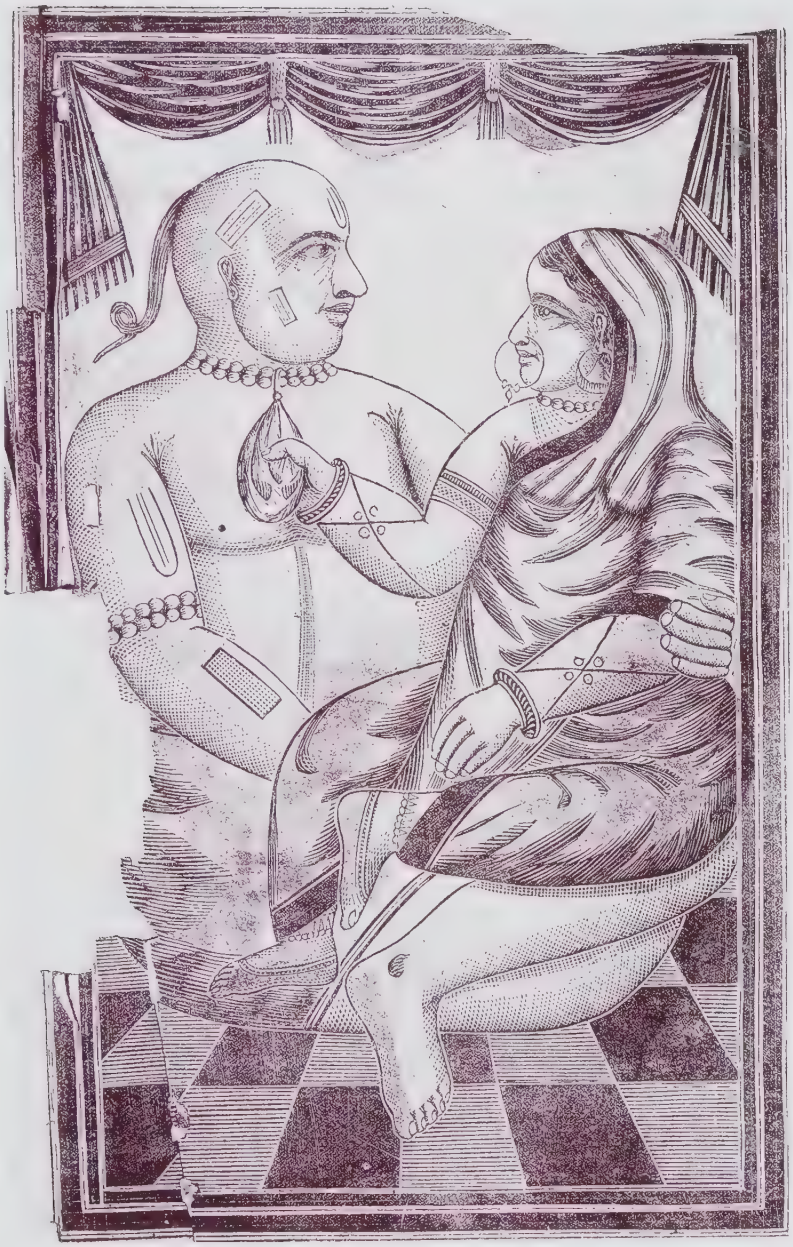

Plate 10 The Elokeshi Affair; Battala woodblock print, anonymous, *c.*1875.

Plate 11 The Elokeshi Affair; Battala woodblock print, anonymous, *c.*1875.

Elokeshi's husband, on hearing of her infidelity, kills her with a kitchen knife.

Elokeshi in the lap of the priest, handing him a *paan*.

depicted him as a tomcat with a fish in its mouth, the caste mark imprinted on its forehead.

Contemporary social conditions found representation not only in the Kalighat pictures but also in popular theatre productions and the popular literature of the time—literature which was, to a large extent, transmitted orally, but which was increasingly also being published in the vernacular by the small printing shops in Battala, a densely packed quarter of craftsmen in Kolkata.

Popular prints in India followed a code at that time, which was closely related to current popular printing in Europe. Similar tendencies of crude palpability in narrative expression can be found in the genre of

Plate 12 The Elokeshi Affair; Battala woodblock print, anonymous, *c.*1875.

The adulterous priest in prison, roped to an oil mill and guarded by a Muslim warden.

European prints labelled 'Theatrical Picture Galleries', which depict dramatic tableaux from local stage productions, and 'Flying Leaves', depicting fairy tales or other narrative material of crude make or rustic expression. These prints comprised some of the most influential source material in the development of the popular image in India.

Indeed, we see no new formulations of the sacral image in popular Indian prints. The images of gods and goddesses were determined by traditional folk idioms that cast legends in a fairly uniform and accepted mythological framework not open to thematic change. The forms of the deities too, as well as their paraphernalia, had long been well established. Changes could therefore only be introduced in the thematic periphery of pictures. *Apsaras,* or celestial nymphs, assumed the aspect of *putti* or angels, and the new sacral space that framed the mythological dramas took the form of imperial architecture with pillared verandas and porticos (*see* Plates 6, 7, 14). Changes in the thematic core were more subtly introduced.

Opposition to obscurantist, traditional socio-religious practices that had never enjoyed widespread public support, and indeed had been abhorred by most, gave birth to reform movements. However, since modernization often carries with it a baggage of social unrest and resistance

Plate 13 Narasimha Avatar; Battala woodblock print, anonymous, *c.*1870.

Narasimha killing the demon Hiranyakasipu.

to change, it is not surprising that some of these practices received a new lease of life in the socially elevated strata of the urbanized middle class. The Shakti cult with its bloody sacrifices (*see* Plates 16, 42–3, 124, 126), incidents of sati, and other regressive social practices that were at this time deemed archaic and rustic were re-introduced on a grand scale and lavishly celebrated. Durga Puja and Kali Puja became Bengali 'State' festivals. The iconography of these cults, of the victorious maiden goddess suppressing the demons of darkness, was later extended to personify Bharat Mata or Mother India (*see* Plates 36–9, 129–31, 136, 138–9, 141–2).

During the latter half of the nineteenth century the traditional images of gods and goddesses were transported into a more naturalistic

*facing page*

Narasimha Avatar from Saurindro Mohun Tagore's book, *The Ten Principal Avataras of the Hindus.*

Plate 14 Narasimha Avatar; Lithograph by Kristohuri Das, 1880.

Plate 15 Parashuram Avatar; Colour lithograph, Kolkata, 1870.

Plate 16 Chinnamasta; Colour lithograph, Kolkata, 1870.

Chinnamasta, the decapitated one, is one of the more terrible forms of Durga. She is treading on a couple in union.

*Plates 15–16*

Two examples of prints from one of the early lithographic art presses in Kolkata. The chalky character of the drawings is interesting and reflects the preferred technique of European (German) art printing, also indicating that the artist most likely trained in the School of Arts in Kolkata.

*facing page*

Vishnu in the form of the axe-wielding Brahmin who appears to humble the Kshatriyas.

landscape. Perspective and depth were attempted but remained rudimentary. It was only later that illusory space was accepted as a means of expressing visual hierarchies, and for its acceptance, popular taste had to be exposed to European imagery to a far greater degree than had earlier been the case. Although the wherewithal to produce these images became available in India with the introduction of lithography around 1820, mass production was possible only after the introduction of steam-driven high-speed presses on which oleographs were produced by thousand per shift. The first of these machines was installed in the Ravi Varma Press in 1894.

As mentioned earlier, the German, Aloys Senefelder discovered the lithographic printing process in 1796, and soon thereafter lithographic presses were brought first to Calcutta, and in quick succession, to other major Indian cities. Lithography was the most suitable process for printing pictures at that time because the artist drew the image directly on a printing stone leaving no room for discrepancy between the master drawing and the print. Of course, in its commercial application, different stages of the printing process were entrusted to a range of different specialists and helpers.

Soon after the introduction of lithography in Kolkata, as we have noted earlier, Mrs C.S. Belnos published in 1832 a portfolio entitled *Twenty Four Plates lllustrative of Hindoo and European Manners in Bengal* (Ray 1979), depicting Indian landscapes enlivened by acrobats, jugglers, the interior of an Indian hut and, in line with the expectations of earlier and present travellers to India, a female corpse drifting on the Ganges, which could easily have been mistaken for a floating Ophelia from a Drury Lane production. The mass-produced visuals had found their technique and their subjects.

The early workshops trained a large number of local workers in the art of lithography, and many of them subsequently founded their own workshops. It was, however, only after the introduction of the British school system and the founding of polytechnics and other crafts institutions in the second half of the nineteenth century that Indian craftsmen received formal training in industrial crafts. The curriculum was similar to that of European industrial schools. Drawing classes focused principally on design, and, to a lesser extent, on studies of the plaster-of-Paris casts of classical statues. In newly established museums, Indian artists had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with European classical arts and designs.

Some of the first students of these institutions in Kolkata founded their own lithographic presses in which they produced large prints of Indian gods and goddesses. Although the artists maintained a central perspective and colour-gradation, the prints were adapted to suit the tastes of the class that the artists sought as patrons; indeed, this was the same milieu the artist hailed from. The prints depicted, besides deities,

*Plates 17–18*

In the early years of the nineteenth century, rich traders and magnates furnished their formal sitting rooms with European prints and oil paintings, and some also patronized local painters who created mythological landscapes with a rich local flavour. In these paintings, the gods and goddesses were set before palatial buildings, like statues along sweeping driveways. These gods conveyed the impression of statues coming alive and performing mythological feats, alas, often in contorted and uncomfortable classical poses under the heavy folds of contemporary classical draperies.

Several of the early litho presses in Kolkata appear to have adopted this style for their religious prints. These colour lithographs—forerunners of the later oleographs—overindulged in the use of vivid prime colours. The mythological subjects of these prints were the same that would soon make the Ravi Varma Press famous. These were the very prints that Ravi Varma once dismissively described to his brother as 'the stuff churned out in the name of religion', and which he sought to reform in his own mythological paintings.

Plate 17 Worshipping Durga; Colour lithograph, Chore Bagan Art Studio, Kolkata, *c.*1875.

Rama, the one with lotus eyes, wanted to win over Durga to his side during the epic struggle against Ravana. To do so he had not only to offer her 1000 blue lotus flowers but also bring to the sacrificial altar her foremost disciple, Ravana. When Rama discovered, during the sacrifice, that he was short of one blue lotus, he attempted to sacrifice one of his eyes instead, at which moment Durga appeared holding the thousandth lotus in her hand, thus preventing Rama from harming himself.

Plate 18 The Circle of Life; Colour lithograph, Chore Bagan Art Studio, Kolkata. *c.*1880.

the material aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie and bazaar class: large four posters and the buxom bibi in an eternal state of dressing her splendid hair, or holding a veena, or violin, in her lap. These large colour-lithographs were expensive and only within the means of rich landowners and the moneyed bazaar bourgeoisie who replaced their English 'sporting prints'—till then the ultimate luxury—with 'German pictures'. Although 'classical sentiments' were introduced in scenes depicting national mythology, the prints clearly evidenced the influence of their European predecessors.

In other parts of India too, local presses sprang up, cashing in on the new market for printed images of gods and goddesses, largely in the form of crude black-and-white renderings of traditional designs. These prints were hand-coloured and sold at pilgrimage sites or in the vicinity of local temples. None of the picture-printing presses then had an organized inter-regional distribution network, and the only large establishment, Calcutta Art Studio, closed shop after a few years in business. The absence of high-speed presses made real mass-production quite impossible.

In 1880, Sourindro Mohun Tagore (Rabindrananth Tagore's uncle), in honour of the thirty-fifth coronation jubilee of Queen Victoria, published a book entitled *The Ten Principal Avataras of the Hindus, and the Murtis as Tableaux Vivants* (Tagore 1880), illustrated by Kristohuri Das (*see* Plate 14). The illustrations were small lithographs of Vaishnava gods. Drawn in a classical fashion, in a style that might be described as academic, the figures were set against naturalistic landscapes or theatrical architecture. Although the book did not gain popularity because of the small print-run, some of the designs were subsequently used for display prints.

The breakthrough for industrially produced visuals in India came only twelve years later, when the famous painter Raja Ravi Varma established his Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press at Mumbai in 1894. With the aid of German master printers and German steam-driven lithographic high-speed presses he was able to produce millions of copies of his own mythological paintings.

*facing page*

This print seems to be a template for the later stories about the lives of famous men, particularly of national leaders (*see also* Plate 145). The various stages of their lives are similarly depicted.

Plate 19 Raja Ravi Varma; Half-tone print, *c.*1950; Portrait by his sister Managalbai Thampuratty, 1904.

3

# Raja Ravi Varma

Ravi Varma (*see* Plates 19, 32) was born in 1848 into one of the important feudal families of Travancore, then the southernmost kingdom of India, along the south-western coast. His family held a small fiefdom at Kilimanoor, a place 50 km north of Thiruvananthapuram.

Although Ravi Varma belonged to the warrior caste, warfare and military prowess in his family had long been a thing of the past. The fine arts and music were accomplishments that several members of the large feudal household sought. Sanskrit scholars, musicians, and poets were to be found amongst close relations. His maternal uncle was a painter of repute and his mother, besides practising Ayurvedic medicine, also composed music for the traditional 'Tullal' opera performances, which were held in the dance halls of feudal courts. Ravi Varma came to the royal court of Thiruvananthapuram as a young boy from his rural ancestral estate of Kilimanoor. Thiruvananthapuram was at that time a sleepy little town with a long history of maritime trade.

For well over a thousand years, the coast of Malabar was the hub of East Asian trade. Roman gold was exchanged for ivory and spices. In keeping with this cosmopolitan ethos, prayer houses of different religions—Jewish synagogues, Syrian Christian churches, and the mosques built by Arab traders after the seventh century—were located there. Following the Middle Ages, there had been an influx of Moorish Jews. Chinese traders sold and bartered their wares for produce from the coast of Africa. The Portuguese, Danish, and Dutch founded their own establishments there and dabbled in local politics until the British bound the small kingdom to itself by entering into a contract of mutual assistance against Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore. From 1800 onwards, the Travancore kingdom became virtually a dominion of the British. The court language after 1800 was English; and the *diwan,* or prime minister, and high officials were under the direct control of the British who had set up their capital in not-so-distant Chennai.

Ravi Varma grew up at Travancore court, where, along with other aristocratic minors, he received his education. Legend has it that he did

*facing page*
Raja Ravi Varma with the Kaiser-i Hind medallion adorning his attire.

not display any exceptional talent except in drawing, an art in which he had already won notoriety at his maternal court in Kilimanoor where he had decorated the walls with murals drawn in charcoal pinched from the palace kitchen. Nonetheless, it was at the royal court in Thiruvananthapuram that his artistic instincts were honed by the available illustrated books and magazines on European art. In one of his autobiographical notes, Ravi Varma recalls how impressed he was by a depiction of Lord Surya in Edward Moor's book, *The Hindu Pantheon* (Moor 1810). His maternal uncle, himself a widely acknowledged gentleman artist, encouraged his nephew's talent. Soon, Ravi Varma was trying his hand at the usual genres: miniature portraits of aristocratic personalities at the court and the like.

The temples and palaces of Kerala house many ancient murals of extraordinary craftsmanship. During the nineteenth century there were still many families of traditional painters, but no murals were being painted on a grand scale any longer; and although the craft had not

Plate 20 The Feast of Roses; Photograph, *c.*1890.

Plate 21 Damayanti; Original litho-stone for the colour Pink, *c.*1895.

The abandoned stone was found by the authors in the premises of the former Ravi Varma Press.

*Plates 20–22*

The illustrations demonstrate how many of Ravi Varma's paintings were either modelled upon photographs, or adapted from illustrations in European magazines. A still from a theatre show called *The Feast of Roses* provided the artist with a pose for his subject, Damayanti, which later became a popular oleographic print.

Plate 22 Damayanti; Oleograph; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1894.

The original print shows two women on a sunlit terrace. Since the prints were obviously darkly varnished, the scenery was changed to a moonlit night, with a hand-painted crescent moon. The bracelets were retouched with gold leaf.

Damayanti is the heroine from the Sanskrit play *Nala and Damayanti*, who falls in love with King Nala. The protagonists of the play learn of each other through hearsay, a swan being the messenger between them. During a *swayamvara* held by Damayanti´s father, Nala had to compete with four of the most powerful gods to win her hand. After they are married, their relationship undergoes severe trials and following a long separation they are eventually happily united.

Plate 23 German prints from the turn of the century.

Pictures such as these adorned the houses of the urban bourgeoisie, particularly in cosmopolitan centres like Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai. These prints not only influenced painters of Ravi Varma's standing, but also local artists who used them as models for their own work on profane mural painting or in decorating private rooms. C. Raja Raja Varma mentions in his diary that he and his brother frequently visited a dealer of German prints in Mumbai to see the latest arrivals.

entirely vanished, it was fast disappearing. Paintings were still being used to beautify private rooms or as adornments for displays during festivals. These were, however, considered mere 'crafts', and while master craftsmen were respected, that was not the case with ordinary practitioners who were treated like slaves or outcastes. In any event, painting was not regarded as a worthy occupation for aristocrats. The status of European art was altogether different, with its quality of novelty and the intriguing fact that paintings were executed on canvas like a reflection in the great Venetian mirrors that were imported by the ton to adorn the spacious halls built to seat the British residents and visitors in style. There were already some Indian artists who had excelled in oil painting on easels, and we know little about where they acquired their mastery. All that is left of them are a few paintings that stand testament to their mastery over this essentially foreign art. Alangiri Naidu was one such artist. His oil paintings are of a quality that surpassed everything that was to be painted in the next half century. Ramaswami Naicker, a court painter some years older than Ravi Varma, also painted in oil, although his talent was no match for that of his aristocratic successor. It was one of Ramaswami Naicker's assistants, Arumugham Pillai, who was instrumental in introducing Ravi Varma to the finer points of oil painting.

When Theodore Jensen, a British painter of Danish origin, came to the court seeking portrait commissions, he was asked to allow Ravi Varma to observe him at work and learn from him. It is said that Jensen

let Ravi Varma watch him at work, but for one reason or another, did not actively teach him to paint (Nayar 1953). This, however, was in 1868, by which time Ravi Varma was a painter in his own right. He was recognized as an artist, but his aristocratic background came in the way of his aspiration to become a wholly professional painter. It was only in 1870, during a long session of worship and meditation before Goddess Mookambika, the guardian deity of his clan, that he dedicated his life to painting. His first work as a professional painter was a family portrait, *Khizzhake Menon and his Family*, executed in Calicut on the way back from a pilgrimage to Goddess Mookambika's temple, situated in the South Kanara district, close to Beypore where Ravi Varma's ancestors had been landowners.

Ravi Varma's early paintings manifest the influence of Tanjore art: figures frontally depicted, adorned with the jewels and paraphernalia of status and caste that Ravi Varma understood so well; indeed, far better than the European painters of the time whose gimmicks and treatment of draperies he soon mastered and was able to handle with equal felicity.

He had two distinct idioms, depending upon whom he worked for. One was for his European clientele, the other to satisfy the luxury needs of the aristocracy and upper-class bourgeoisie. While European portraiture had already established itself as a culturally viable product, which was soon to be overtaken by photography, the local aristocracy's demand for large portraits in heavy oil was a relatively novel fad adopted from their European suzerains. This novelty replaced traditional portraiture in which the person being painted stood or sat beside the tutelary goddess in the attitude of a suppliant. The large oil portraits, on the other hand, were to decorate the new palatial buildings of the aristocracy, which were planned to pictorially negate their political obsolescence through dramatized spectacles of statecraft.

Ravi Varma was soon at work as a highly paid decorator for the newly erected palaces in Mysore, Puddukottai, Vadodara, and Bhavnagar. Palace buildings were ambitious edifices, often built by German or other European architects, with a financial and architectural *carte blanche* and where the only stipulation was that the portico should be high enough to allow the state elephant with the silver-plated howdah to pass through. Ravi Varma had, of course, his political mentors who opened for him the gates to the rich and powerful, but it was his personal charisma that enabled him to hold on to this milieu. He appears to have been a likeable socialite, equal in status to most of his clientele, and with a gift for being able to flatter with his art even the least attractive features of his customers. He was their first choice, as portrait painter, to cover the celebrations during the coronation of the rulers of Puddukottai and Mysore. For the redecoration of the palace in Mysore he was asked to paint a series of large mythological pictures. Depicting scenes from national epics, he

initiated a trend of 'mythological decoration' that became a fashion all over India.

It was not as if there had been no mythological painting earlier, but Ravi Varma and his clientele celebrated what the colonial establishment had envisaged for India—to quote Lord Napier from a speech at the Christian Literary Society in Chennai in 1871:

> All that is needed to promulgate their [the Indian epics'] beauty and complete their fame is that in their purer and nobler passages and with the power of European art, they should engage the national pencil as they have fastened on the national memory and animated the national voice.... [Pillai 1928].

European linguistic and antiquarian sciences were then just in the process of systematically analysing Indian languages and culture. Hitherto forgotten legends from the vast body of Sanskrit literature had not only catalysed a new Indian renaissance, but had also stimulated European philosophy and literature. One of the most outstanding of these literary pieces was the play *Shakuntala*, which succeeded in capturing the imagination of philosophers and poets alike, while its heroine, Shakuntala, became one of the guardian deities of European Romanticism. There was scarcely a poet of the time who did not dedicate a few lines to her, composers practised their craft under her name, and recitals from *Shakuntala* were not considered a success unless they caused a few members of the female audience to swoon.

'Shakontala, Nala, whom one must kiss!' wrote Goethe, who was not otherwise partial to applied Indian art because of

> These unpleasant trunks of elephants
> hissing snakes around the neck ...

And before Goethe, Herder had found his Elysium in India

> Where Shakontala lived with her vanished boy,
> Where Dushyanta receives her anew, anew from the gods,
> Hail to thee, O holy land, and
> thou, leader of sounds,
> Voice of the heart,
> uplift me often thither through celestial space.

*Shakuntala* or *The Fateful Ring* was translated by Georg Forster from William Jones' English version only in 1791 and had a huge impact on the German readership with their penchant for sentimentality. It is well known that legendary heroes are seen at their most heroic when oppression rules; legendary morals are most highly regarded when depravity takes over; and imagination is at its wildest when life is stolid and cramped. All these conditions were rolled into one in Germany at the time of the Aufklärung, the Age of Enlightenment, when aspirations were projected into the past or to distant lands. *Shakuntala* catered entirely to the requirement for distance in both space and time.

*facing page*

Ravi Varma painted a version of this theme as early as 1867, and many versions thereafter. The first painting was bought by Lord Buckingham, and served as the frontispiece for Sir Monier William's famous English translation of the play, *Shakuntala*. That very year, another painting entitled *Malabar Beauty*, which had a woman sleeping beneath a diaphanous veil, caught the fancy of the Prince of Wales, the later King Edward VII, who saw it during a hunting expedition in Travancore. The painting was eventually gifted to him, bringing Ravi Varma widespread recognition as the unquestioned master of colonial art in India.

*Shakuntala* was also one of Ravi Varma's favourite mythological themes, from which he transformed several of the well-known dramatic sequences into paintings, many of which seem to be in accordance with the aesthetic laws of the German Romantic Movement (*see* Plates 24–5, 27, 51–2). In one of the paintings, the heroine, a buxom shepherdess in a fringed sari, was depicted reclining in a forest meadow, inscribing her desire for Prince Dushyanta on a lotus leaf (*see* Plate 24). The dramatization of his mythological scenery was later deemed to have been badly informed, historically and ethnologically improbable, and overall devoid of Indian sentiments. Even so, the diffused forces of early nationalism viewed it as a vision of a purer Hinduism which they aspired to attain 'striding forward by looking backwards ...' (Thomas Mann).

The greatness of Ravi Varma lies not so much in his dramatization of Indian mythology into 'realistically' painted *tableaux vivants* in the new medium of oil painting, but, equally important, in organizing and supplying the market with his highly prized commodities, making the big and small feudal lords, rulers, and magnates vie with one another to have him work for them; and indeed, the artist did them the honour.

Plate 24 Shakuntala Writing a Love Letter on a Lotus Leaf; Oleograph, Ravi Varma Press, *c.*1900.

Plate 25 Birth of Shakuntala; Oleograph with tinsel-retouch, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1890.
(*see also* note on Plates 51–2).

*Plates 25–7*

While scenes from mythology replaced German prints, the scarcely dressed European nymphs were mildly Indianized to represent apsaras, goddesses, and heroines of the indigenous past. Female nudity for male voyeurism, sanitized by a nationalistic/religious veneer, warded off any threat from censorship.

Plate 27 Vishvamitra and Menaka; Oleograph, Ravi Varma Press, 1905; Painting by Durandhar.

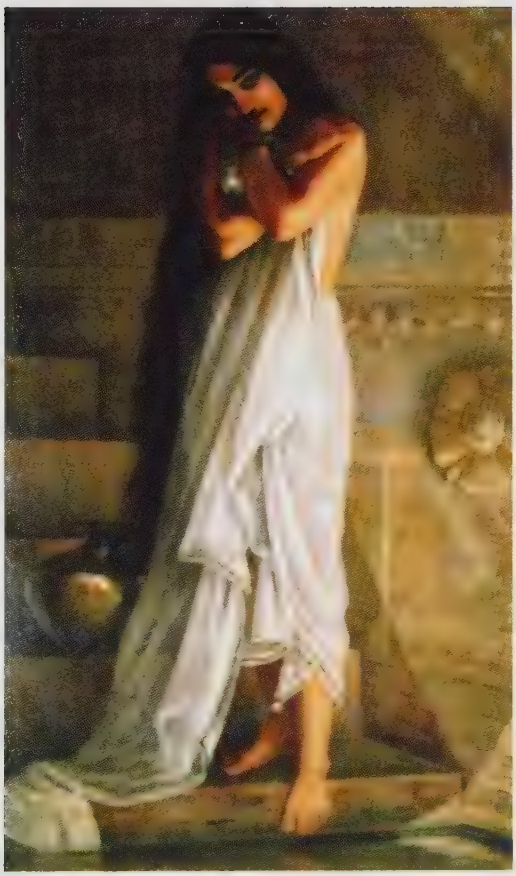

Plate 26 At the Bath; Oil painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1901.

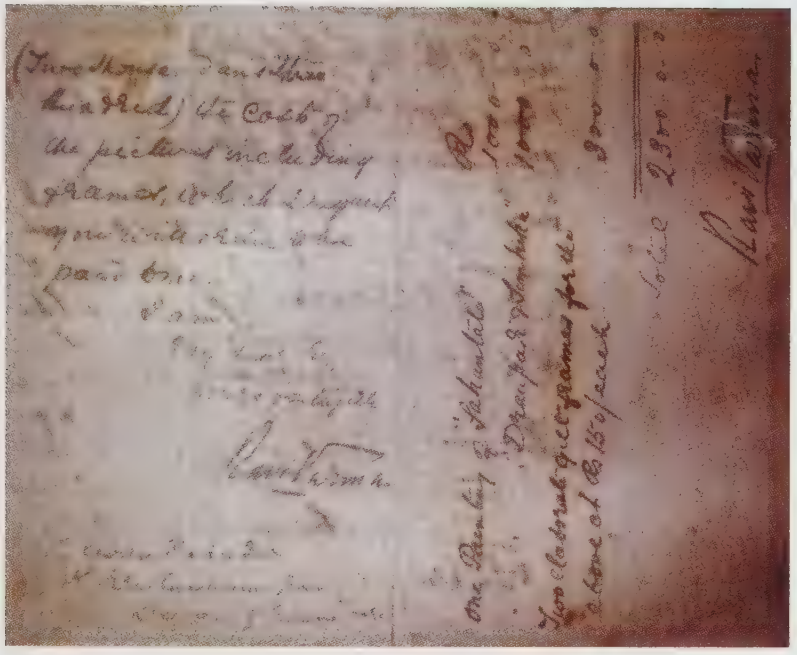

Plate 28a.

*Plates 28a–b*

Paybill dated May 1898 for Rs. 2,300 towards the sale of *Shakuntala*, *Draupadi and Simhika,* inclusive of the cost of gilt frames.

From 1895 onwards, Ravi Varma annually painted several paintings for a proposed art gallery in Thiruvananthapuram. Although the gallery was not built during his lifetime, the paintings now constitute the core collection of the city's Museum of Fine Arts.

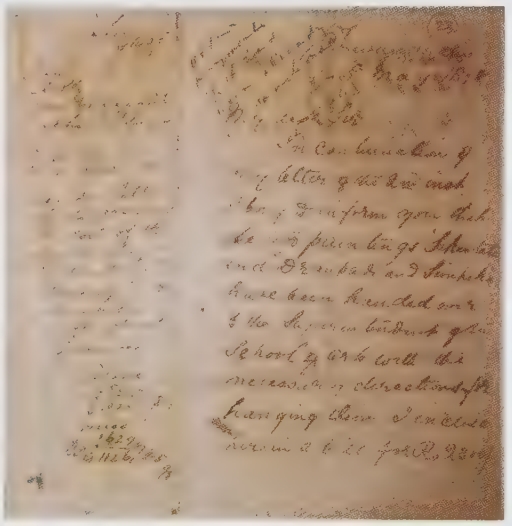

Plate 28b.

Ravi Varma's visits to moneyed patrons all over India were well-organized business tours with signed preliminary contracts, regulating not only the cost of the work to be undertaken, but also details of the housing and working conditions to be provided to the artist and his retinue. Some of the surviving court documents also provide details of the demands he made for the arrangements to be made for his entertainment, particularly on the choice of musicians and dancers (Neumayer and Schelberger 1996).

Ravi Varma's assistant and secretary during most of the large commissions was his youngest brother, C. Raja Raja Varma (1861–1905), who was himself an accomplished painter. During the tours, his brother maintained a diary that meticulously recorded details of the artistic and financial aspect of the brothers' enterprises (Varma 1896; Neumayer and Schelberger 1996). The price for a full-length painting was Rs. 1500 down to Rs. 350 for a small portrait. The gilt frames for the larger paintings were priced at Rs. 150 (*see* Plates 28a, 28b). The diary clearly states that these prices were non-negotiable. These were huge amounts at the time considering that the average per capita annual income in India was a mere thirty rupees! The diary at one point refers to an incident in which the house of an agricultural labourer was burnt down by a truant fire-cracker during a religious procession. The damage was recompensed by a payment of ten rupees.

Ravi Varma's remuneration did not, however, always take the form of cash. Gifts of considerable value were also presented. In Mysore the artist received two elephants and other courts were scarcely less lavish. Purses of gold as well as ceremonial attire and shawls changed hands.

The entertainment at some of the other courts was nothing short of royal. Palatial buildings were provided to the artist and his retinue as studios and living quarters; nautch girls and music maestros entertained them during their stay— one prosaic diary entry notes: 'we worked immersed in music'; coaches and grooms were at their command; and court servants from diverse regions were available in case they expressed a wish to sketch a particular racial type in traditional attire or adornment.

Still, travelling through India around 1900 was not always a pleasurable experience. Several diary entries speak about seedy quarters, unsuitable food, and unhealthy climate that eventually took its toll on the health of the Varma brothers.

By 1890 Ravi Varma was a celebrity whose signature was the trademark of art. He was on intimate terms with the socially and politically well connected, more frequently in evidence with the administrators of the British sovereign, as well as with personalities who would soon challenge their authority.

In 1893, Ravi Varma sent ten of his paintings to the Colombian World Exposition in Chicago. The title of his consignment was 'The Life of the Native People' and it consisted of pictures of women in traditional attire symbolizing the different regions of India (*see* Plates 29–30). The paintings won him two gold medals, the news of which was received enthusiastically in India. However, a close look at the Diploma reveals that Ravi Varma's paintings were not exhibited in the general section for art but in the one devoted to ethnography. His work was admired not so much for its artistic excellence, but rather as an artefact 'of much ethnological value ... giving careful attention to the detail of costume and articles used in the social and ceremonial life ... These paintings give a good idea of the progress of instruction in Art' (Diploma, World's Colombian Exposition 1893).

The Diploma congratulated the British administration for the successful instruction of natives at least as much as the artist personally, which is somewhat curious as Ravi Varma had received no formal academic instruction whatsoever in art. In recalling Ravi Varma's successful participation in the Colombian Exposition in 1893, it is generally overlooked that several other Indian artists participated there with similar success. The photographer Raja Deen Dayal, who covered many tours of visiting European aristocrats with his camera, was similarly honoured with a gold medal, as were over three-fourths of the individual participants and firms from all over the world. In the official catalogue of the art section, none of the Indian participants were even so much as mentioned. Indeed, the Colombian Exposition was an entertainment extravaganza, where the burlesque eroticism of 'Little Egypt', the belly dancer Fahreda Mahzar, who thrust her hips into the faces of the spectators, was surely more important than the many holy men from India and elsewhere who had also participated in the Parliament of Religions, where the Hindu

Plate 29a.

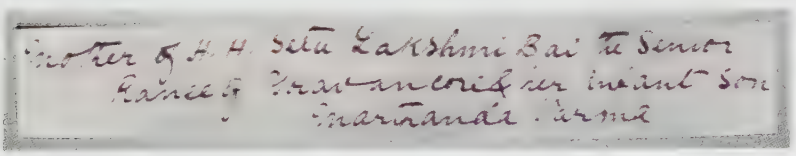


Plate 29b.

Plate 29c.

*Plates 29a, b and c*

Studio photographs for Ravi Varma's painting entitled *Here Comes Papa*, 1893 (*see* facing page).

*facing page*

*Here Comes Papa* was one of the ten paintings sent by Raja Ravi Varma to the Colombian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. His elder daughter Mahaprabha and her little son Marthanda Varma served as models for this painting. The somewhat complicated entry in the family album, '... Mother of H.H. Setu Lakshmi Bai the senior Ranee of Travancore ...' (Plate 29b), mentions that two of the daughters of the lady in the picture were adopted by the childless senior Ranee of Travancore as Ranees of Attingale.The pet dog in the painting is in keeping with European aristocratic portraiture.

Plate 30 Here Comes Papa; Painting by Ravi Varma, 1893.

Plate 31 Fritz Schleicher, the German chief technician and later, owner of the Ravi Varma Press; Portrait by Dandekhar, 1932.

philosopher Vivekananda had held forth, as had Angarika Dharmapala of Ceylon on behalf of the Buddhist faith.

Ravi Varma's successful participation in this international forum cemented his fame throughout India. He was hailed as the first Indian artist who had, in the face of international competition, emerged with flying colours. The gold medals and the two diplomas he was awarded were proof of that.

In 1892, at about the same time that he had just successfully completed a large commission for the court of Baroda, Ravi Varma founded a printing press to industrially produce renderings of his own mythological pictures. It was with the sheer number of the prints produced and distributed by this press that Ravi Varma introduced a new pan-Indian iconography. His pioneering printing enterprise had made him the father of modern mass communication in India.

Plate 32 Photograph of Ravi Varma, 1904.

However, managing a press was not part of Ravi Varma's nature. Very soon he passed on the burden of management to his youngest brother, C. Raja Raja Varma, and within ten years the Varma brothers pulled out from the ownership of the press altogether. Even so, Ravi Varma continued to supply the press with paintings especially made for replication. The new press owner, the German printer Fritz Schleicher (*see* Plate 31), not only retained the famous name of the press, but also the stock of more than one hundred pictures that had earlier been painted by Ravi Varma for the press.

After his adventure with the press came to a close, Ravi Varma resumed his artistic tours during the cool season, increasingly involving C. Raja Raja Varma in the bulk of the work. These portraits received the imprimatur of the celebrated Raja Ravi Varma, his signature in line with the requirements of the market. In 1904 Raja Ravi Varma was awarded the Kaiser-i Hind medal, which had, until then, been reserved solely for persons in trade and industry (*see* Plates 19, 32). By then his name was a household word in India, and his flowing signature constituted a trademark recognized all over the country.

It was while completing a large commission in Mysore that C. Raja Raja Varma fell ill. He died soon after New Year's Day in 1905. This was a heavy blow for the elder brother. The almost symbiotic relationship between the two brothers was publicly acclaimed, and had earned them the epithet 'Ram and Laxman of Art'. Following the death of his brother, Raja Ravi Varma's own failing health deteriorated rapidly. Barely a year and a half later, shortly after the royal household had adopted two of his granddaughters, he died in October 1906. His art was until then unchallenged; but soon after, Modern Indian Art began to be evaluated on the basis of its indigenous content, its Indian flavour, and its nationalist leanings, thus differentiating it from colonial art. By this time, however, Ravi Varma's imagery had sunk deep into the subconscious of the Indian soul. No other artist or art movement would ever achieve his kind of popularity. To this day he remains the most influential visionary of Modern Indian Art.

Plate 33 Lakshmi; Lithographic masterstone, *c.*1900.

A detail from the masterstone shows the contours of the individual colours (*see* facing page). This stone is not used to print, but carries all the relevant information for printing.

# The Industrialization of Gods

In Mumbai, Raja Ravi Varma together with his financial partner, Gowardhan Das Khatan Makhanji, a Mumbai-based industrialist, raised money to establish in 1892 the Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press, which was to begin work in 1894. Two steam-powered high-speed lithographic presses imported from Germany formed the heart of the enterprise. Until then, Germany was exporting large quantities of cheap chromo-lithographs all over the world. Indeed, it held an almost de facto monopoly of chromo-litho printing during the second half of the nineteenth century, and in India these prints were for a long time referred to as 'German prints', although they might have been produced in Austria or Italy, where sizeable printing industries had been established as well.

Plate 34 Lakshmi; Oleograph, 1900.
(*see also* Plates 55–6)

The idea of printing Indian iconography for the indigenous market was not new. Several Indian artists had their designs sent to Austria and Germany to have them lithographed there, but none of these prints made much of an impact on the Indian market that, in any case, was small and saturated with foreign display prints of questionable taste. When Ravi Varma established his press, he pioneered an enterprise whose success was by no means assured. His plan was simple: to produce high-quality prints from his own mythological paintings. Letters to that end had already been exchanged over ten years between the artist and his political mentor, Sir T. Madhava Rao, who had already suggested in 1884 that '[you] send ... a few of your selected works to Europe and have them oleographed. You will not only extend your reputation, but will be doing a real service to the country ...' (Nayar 1953). Madhava Rao's idea was in accord with other early nationalists who wanted to strengthen the pride of Indians in their own cultural heritage and greatness. Lokmanya Tilak declared: 'Hero worship makes a nation great!' Ravi Varma's renderings of mythic and historic heroes suited this project of furnishing a Hindu nation with a heroic past. He himself mentioned once, or so the story goes, that he wanted to print his mythological paintings for the masses 'to challenge the stuff which was churned out in the name of

Plate 35a *Maharashtra Beauty* on postcard, 1907.

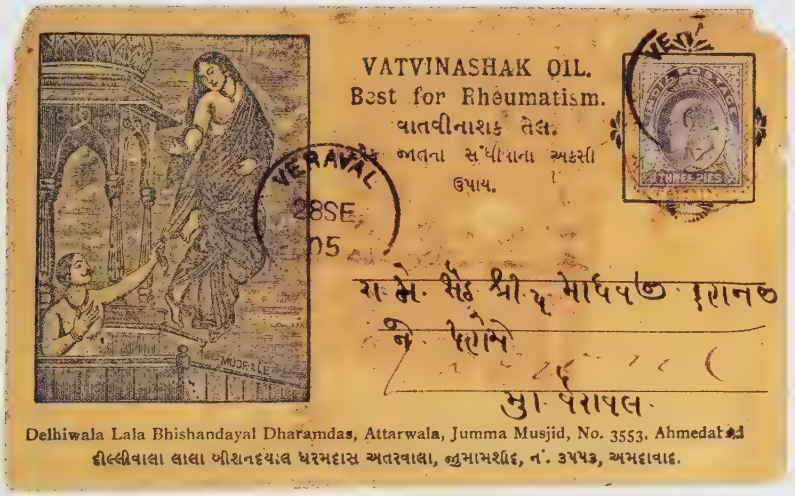


Plate 35b *Urvashi* on postcard, 1905.

*Plates 35a–b*

Ravi Varma's paintings were perhaps the first pan-Indian images used in the production of industrially designed goods as well as in craft design. These images could often be found on cast iron parapet elements, fabric labels, matchboxes, and even postcards. His designs acquired popularity among traditional craftsmen who carved them in ivory and other sundry materials.

religion....' He was referring to prints from Poona Press, a small lithographic workshop that specialized in producing crude prints of Indian gods and goddesses.

Besides the initial capital requirement, printing large editions of colour pictures demanded two preconditions. First, the printing machines had to comprise high-speed presses driven by steam, which could enable runs of 500 to 800 impressions per hour. These presses had been available in Europe since the middle of the century when lithography was 'revolutionized' in the technical sense of the word. The new stream-driven presses did away with the cumbersome process of manually operating the scraper, under which lay the litho stone covered with paper to be printed, and where every impression demanded the careful application of colour on the printing stone. In an oleographic speed press, however, a large cylinder not only exerted the required pressure on the stone, but also simultaneously fed in the paper to be printed. Even the process of applying ink on the printing stone was mechanized, as was the traction

of the stone. Once the master printer had prepared and set the stone and tuned the machine, trained labour could take over. The latter were paid a daily wage, greatly cutting down the cost of printing.

The second precondition was an organized distribution network to sell the prints. This was a problem that remained unresolved for Ravi Varma, who had to build this network from scratch. The first prints from the press were highly priced which further restricted their circulation to only urban centres.

The press was still struggling through initial technical difficulties and setbacks when the situation in downtown Mumbai became impossible following the outbreak of the bubonic plague, which triggered off social unrest and a nationalist uprising. The industrial life of Mumbai was affected and the Ravi Varma Press closed down for several months as workers and owners both left the city. Huge losses were incurred on account of the German technicians whose salaries had to be paid, regardless. When, in 1898, the press was shifted from crowded Girgaum to the less congested Ghatkopar locality on the outskirts of the city, it still did not function undisturbed. There too it lay idle for a long time, accumulating further losses.

Making money may not have been the obvious motive of the Ravi Varma enterprise, but idealistic considerations could not have made his financial partner invest a considerable initial capital, and when, by 1898, the expected return did not materialize, Ravi Varma's business partner Gowardhan Das Khaitan Makhanji sold his share, which the Varma brothers bought back for Rs 22,000.

Now, as the sole owner of the press, Ravi Varma made C. Raja Raja Varma responsible for its administration, and it was he who saw it through some of the juridical problems with debtors and other adversities. The technical management of the press, however, was in the hands of experienced printers from Germany who were instrumental in introducing their highly organized management and work methods, which included special techniques for the treatment of the printing stone and picture transfer from the master stone to the individual colour-print stones. Popular Indian imagery was as much influenced by the technical methods and stylistic conventions of these technicians, as from cheap, imported 'Made in Germany' prints.

It was after 1901 that the press was moved for the third time to its final premises at Malavli, high up in the Western Ghats. It was only when the German chief technician of the press, Fritz Schleicher (*see* Plate 31), became the owner of the press that the market widened. He extended the palette of his products to posters, labels, and other profane advertisement prints, for which he curtailed the number of colours used to a mere seven from the original fourteen. 'Mr Schleicher is printing cheap pictures to oust the cheap German pictures from the Indian market ...' noted C. Raja Raja Varma in his diary in 1903, during one of his last visits

to the new premises of the press in Malavli (Neumayer and Schelberger 1996).

A general Indianization was the result of Schleicher's takeover, and it appears to be a travesty of history that the Indianization of popular modern Indian imagery received its greatest fillip from the commercialization of sacral Indian icons by a German Protestant printer, who saw the necessity of taking on headlong the German display prints imported into India. Cashing in on the demand of a large and socially diverse market, he produced religious images in the traditional iconic form, with multi-armed and multi-headed gods and goddesses depicting 'the darker aspects of Hinduism'.

By 1903, Fritz Schleicher was the copyright holder of over a hundred mythological pictures by Ravi Varma. He controlled the largest body of the best-loved visuals in India, which he used to the maximum commercial advantage. This included using the images of Indian gods and goddesses and other mythological characters in advertisements for merchandise ranging from matchsticks, infant-food, and Gripe Water to tobacco, and many other commodities. Very soon, the Ravi Varma Press, now fully in German hands, became a veritable goldmine. It was the most innovative press in India, and its products were also the most plagiarized.

The volume of printed advertisements and labels grew in unison with the growing number of pre-packaged goods. Mass-produced advertisements, in their recycled form, transported mythical images to every nook and corner, including localities that still lay beyond the ambit of modern-day economics. The colourful prints thus provided to all an entrée into the modern world—a world where gods could be bought for a pittance. If the paintings by Ravi Varma had become a status symbol for the anglicized urban bourgeoisie, the industrial magnates, and the feudal aristocracy, the early prints from the Ravi Varma Press became a symbol of cultural refinement for the urban middle class, while the prints of the later years established themselves as a mere commodity for the ever-widening strata of the population, with little status attached to them.

# Printing for Independence

It was not long before the visionaries of an Indian nation realized the potential that lay in harnessing popular mythological images for a nationalist cause. They saw, in these pictures, the portrayal of a glorious past, the propagation of which would induce in the beholders a sense of belonging to a great and once glorious tradition. India began to be projected as a country that had, over the centuries, been oppressed by foreign powers which had eroded and manipulated her traditional values; her culture was portrayed as one which, though failing in material advancement, had an inherent metaphysical strength and which enabled her to absorb past and present invaders. This was a rallying call to muster popular support for an independent India, the India for which gods and national heroes had struggled from time immemorial.

Heroes who had led battles against invaders in long bygone ages were seen as martyrs in the long struggle for Indian nationhood. There was Prithviraj Chauhan, who had attempted to forge a Rajput alliance against the invading Afghans in the twelfth century; Maharana Pratap Singh, the Rajput prince who did not cease to fight despite the fall of one kingdom after another to the imperial Mughals, and who, by the sheer dint of chivalry and relentless warfare, had brought large stretches of Mewar under his rule again. There was also Shivaji (*see* Plates 37, 130, 132–3), the Maratha ruler who, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had carved out a large and powerful state from the southern flanks of the Mughal empire and become the guardian deity of Maratha nationalism during the late nineteenth century.

The nationalist movement armed itself with a past, its leaders making the most of a rich heritage replete with heroic legends from ancient epics, which were deeply ingrained in many layers of the Indian psyche. The sheer reverence and admiration for these legends could be readily manipulated into fervent nationalist passion. The transformation of this passion into uniform images that could be easily replicated and widely distributed became one of the most potent weapons in the hands of those leading the nationalist movement. In these pictures, the gods were equipped with nationalistic paraphernalia and national leaders were

projected almost like celestial beings (*see* Plates 132–3, 135). The depiction of indigenous heroes was in itself a message, a message that could not possibly be censored. Goddess Bhavani was depicted handing over a sword to Shivaji, who successfully lifted it against the Deccan sultans and their suzerain, the imperial Mughals (*see* Plates 37, 132–3). There were also pictures of 'Netaji' Subhash Chandra Bose kneeling in front of Bharat Mata with outstretched arms, receiving his sword from her (*see* Plates 37–8).

Plate 36 Bharat Mata; Gouache on paper by Abanindranath Tagore, 1905.

Bharat Mata depicted as a four-armed goddess. Originally perceived as Banga Mata, she holds the symbols of India's struggle for independence and self-reliance: a sheaf of rice, a book, a rosary, and a piece of cloth symbolizing food, knowledge, religion and clothing.

The personification of India as Goddess Bharat Mata or Mother India (*see* Plates 36–9, 136, 138–9, 141–2) is particularly interesting. When first conceived in 1905 by Abanindranath Tagore, she was Banga Mata, the personification of an undivided Bengal that was soon to be divided to serve colonial administrative ends. It was only after the division of Bengal into the states of Bihar, Assam, Bengal, and Orissa, that the picture of the Goddess Banga Mata reincarnated itself as Bharat Mata (Hoskote 2000). Abanindranath Tagore painted Banga Mata/Bharat Mata as Lakshmi, the Goddess of Plenty, clad in the apparel of a Vaishnava nun (*see* Plate 36). Prior to that, Ravi Varma had painted the goddess standing against a halo of light dressed in a deep red sari, holding the paraphernalia of Durga and Britannia—the hook, the snare, the arrow, and the frond of victory—in her four hands. Lying at her feet were two African lions, suggestive of the goddess's powerful *vahana* or celestial vehicle (*see* Plate 39).

Interestingly, this hybrid iconography of the goddess could be read as the pictorial counterpart of high imperialist representations of a superficially Indianized self-rule, even as it opens the possibility of a specifically nationalist imagery. The lion, a symbol of British might and power, was portrayed as a subdued creature sitting at the feet of the goddess, who used the animal as her *vahana*. That the lions are African is not surprising considering that Ravi Varma often drew his images from global iconography. In the later and more popular versions, Bharat Mata was depicted with many arms that held the symbols of the struggle for national emancipation besides the god-given weapons with which to fight the demon of darkness (*see* Plate 136). Still later, when Independence was being delayed with every Round Table Conference, she was depicted as a maiden in shackles, raped by foreign oppressors. When, after a prolonged struggle, India finally became independent in 1947, she was shown holding high the banners of the Congress movement, her broken chains still about her arms.

For reasons somewhat difficult to comprehend, individual leaders of the independence struggle only rarely used the popular medium of display prints and, therefore, portraits of Indian national leaders did not take the form of an obvious personality cult. This apparent demureness on the part of Indian politicians was certainly no inborn quality (politicians here are no different from those elsewhere!); it was in all probability due to an understanding that display prints were reserved for the celestial and market forces, leaving little scope for portraits of politicians. It was only the foremost representatives of the Indian National Congress who made it into the prints—Mahatma Gandhi (*see* Plates 139, 141–6) for instance, whose political and moral credo was interwoven with religious and puritanical symbols that readily lent themselves to the popular medium of display prints. Gandhi appears adorned with the paraphernalia of a religious mendicant—his emaciated body in symbiosis with his

walking stick, a dhoti tucked up well above the knees, his lean striding legs and simple sandals elevating him above other leaders whose clothes, though traditional and homespun, lent them a 'folkloric' rather than 'elevated' aspect. If Gandhi, with his bare feet, was the icon of the deprived and the downtrodden, other leaders in their polished boots signified the dignity of statesmanship. His eternally friendly toothless grin is accentuated by wire-framed goggles, and his short-cropped head is uncovered. This picture of an itinerant hermit is only mildly incongruent with an old-fashioned watch knotted in a fold of his dhoti. This self-chosen image united Gandhi with the teeming millions of the poorest, most deprived, and oppressed of his countrymen. He was the avatar of the have-nots, and in the display prints he was placed as such in the realm of the great gods.

Since the central plank of Gandhi's ideology was non-violence, it is not surprising that his icons borrowed their symbolism from Vaishnava iconography. He is portrayed as a provider, providing the nation with khadi—a homespun fabric—or offering benediction (*see* Plate 142). The violence of bloody sacrifices or revenge from Shaivite iconography has never been associated with the Mahatma. His tragic death by an assassin's bullets was metaphorically depicted in the pictures—like Krishna slain by the shaft from Jara's bow, he is felled by three bullets (*see* Plate 146); death carries him to the region of the gods where he is in congress with all the other freedom fighters, the gods, the Buddha, and the crucified Jesus. Other prints of the slain Mahatma also depict him in the lap of Bharat Mata—an Indian pieta—under the flying banner of an independent nation (*see* Plates 139, 141).

Jawaharlal Nehru was another personality most frequently depicted in the prints. He was portrayed more as a man of the world, clad in a high-buttoned coat with a rosebud in one buttonhole, a 'Nehru cap' on his head, *churidar,* and black shining shoes, and with an eternally youthful, mildly amused expression—all suggestive of a dandy (*see* Plate 150–1, 153–4).

Iconographically, the most intriguing prints are those of Subhash Chandra Bose. As 'Netaji' (the leader), Subhash Chandra Bose became one of the most charismatic figures of the Indian struggle for independence (*see* Plates 38, 156–9). His life story, refurbished with myths woven around his persona, enrich the tales of the struggle for independence. He is remembered as the martial hero who had waged his own war against the British during World War II, for the freedom of his motherland. A revolutionary intellectual, he seemed to have given the legends about him a martial bent long before he started his adventurous opposition to the Allied war efforts during the World War. Already in 1928, when Subhash Chandra Bose became the general officer commanding in the Indian National Congress Volunteer Corps, a rather poorly equipped paramilitary volunteer body, uniformed in khaki half-pants, armed with long bamboo sticks, and employed in crowd control during Congress rallies, photographs of him as

Plate 37 Shivaji before Bhavani; Oleograph, Ravi Varma Press, *c.*1925.

Shivaji, the leader of the Maratha struggle against the imperial Mughals, receives the sword from Bhavani. (*see also* Plate 130).

Plate 38 Astra Dan (Gift of Arms); Half-tone print, *c.*1940.

Like Shivaji before him, Subhash Chandra Bose receives a weapon from Durga, to be used in the struggle for India's independence. With the sword comes the flag of the Indian National Congress. (*see also* Plate 129).

'General Officer Commanding'—astride a horse, wearing a martial outfit and holding a sword of command—were circulated. His political pamphlets, distributed amongst the Indian population of Burma and eastern India during the formative period of the Indian National Army were, at that time, modelled upon Nazi and Stalinist propaganda. This visual arrangement also figures in some of the political display prints of the early-independence era, particularly those that propagated the first few Five Year Plans. By then, however, the driving martial pathos had been replaced with visions of buxom female reapers in the foreground and ploughmen drawing furrows in the cloudy horizon.

In several prints, Bose is shown wearing a Kabuli attire (a brightly embroidered vest and an Afghan turban), perhaps reminiscent of the route he took during his flight from British confinement. His flight from his family's mansion in Kolkata—where he was on parole to regain his health after a prolonged jail sentence in 1941—brought him, via Kabul and the USSR, to Germany. In Germany he founded the Indian National Army, recruiting soldiers from amongst Indian prisoners of war captured by the Germans during their initially successful North African campaign. However, with Germany's defeat in North Africa, Bose had to abandon his plan to support the German invasion of British India from the north-west. He left Germany in a submarine, and was transferred to a Japanese submarine in the Indian Ocean. As soon as he reached Sumatra, he flew to Japan, and back to Singapore (at that time, under Japanese occupation) to form an army comprising Indian prisoners of war taken by the Japanese during their campaigns against the British Indian army in South-east Asia. The Indian National Army (INA), as it was called, marched into India, but was defeated in one of its early engagements near Kohima, close to the Indo-Burmese border. This was one of the decisive battles of World War II, when the rollback of the Nippon Army from South-east Asia had begun.

The Indian market abounded with prints of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. His iconography is clearly related to the tenth incarnation of Vishnu—Kalki, who is symbolized as the rider of a white mare, cleansing the world with his sword in order to establish a new era of righteousness. It is obvious that these prints were modelled upon European fascist visual propaganda, for Bose is also frequently depicted as a Führer attired in a martial uniform complete with khaki breeches, an army belt, a commanding sword or staff, and a chest covered with fancy decorations (*see* Plates 156–9). He reportedly died in 1945 in a plane accident at Formosa. As the circumstances of his death are still shrouded in mystery, a large body of legends and myths has grown around him, particularly in Bengal, his home state.

Prints distributed during the last phase of the struggle for independence were printed using the half-tone technique. New developments in printing

technology also resulted in a change of aesthetics. The size of the prints tended to be smaller than that of the oleographs. New techniques dispensed with the highly glossy quality of the earlier prints. Now printed in only three colours—a far smaller palette as compared to the fourteen or seven colours of the oleographic prints—they had a somewhat drab appearance, rather like newsprint. Since many of these prints were made in small workshops, the artists worked them like collages of newspaper picture clippings, introducing a fair amount of their own folksy iconography.

If the litho process ushered in a European aesthetic in the popular arts of India, the half-tone and offset printing techniques reversed this trend. New popular images were no longer created in accordance with European laws of pictorial hierarchies, but fell back on a long-standing tradition of size hierarchies, where the main subject was brought into the foreground, and narrative elements were pushed into the peripheral space and sized according to their importance. It is not a coincidence that while this trend in the popular arts strove to emulate the more traditional forms of pictorial representation (with thematic centres, customary colour and positional hierarchies, etc.), elitist urban art tried its hand at using similar representational codes in painting to explore a wider field of visual expression.

One of the principal reasons for the 'indigenization' of popular imagery was the rise of many smaller printing presses all over India. Letterpresses in local print shops could now produce smaller pictures more inexpensively, and cater to popular taste with locally relevant designs.

None of the pioneers of calendar art, either before independence or after, nurtured an ambition for social emancipation, and to have expected them to do so would be to misunderstand the thrust of this medium, which was to sell itself either as display prints, advertisements, or both, in order to reach as wide a market as possible.

At the beginning of it all there was a programmatic nationalist agenda, and in 1882, Sir T. Madhava Rao wrote to Raja Ravi Varma:

> there are many of my friends who are desirous of possessing your work. It would be hardly possible for you, with only a pair of hands, to meet such a large demand. Send therefore a few of your select works to Europe and have them oleographed. You will thereby not only extend your reputation, but will be doing a real service to the country....

T. Madhava Rao believed Ravi Varma could do 'real service to the country' if he used his paintings to revive national myths—myths that could inculcate a sense of 'Hindu' cultural identity, and which could serve as moral catechism to reinforce a traditional social order increasingly threatened by the new cultural aspirations of a growing middle class that looked more towards Europe for fulfilment.

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By 1898, Raja Ravi Varma had already visualized the Goddess of India as a maiden robed in red and gold, holding the mascots of war and peace (the arrow and the palm leaf), and state power (the goad and the snare). Two African lions appear at her feet, reminiscent of Durga's vahana. As a national goddess, she takes on the character of the deity of India, who also holds the strength of Britannia

Plate 39 Durga; Oil on board, Ravi Varma, 1898.

Indeed, Ravi Varma's art idealized the legendary and epic past as an era of paternalistic benevolence. It committed itself to what Lord Napier had said in a speech on opportunities in new Indian fine arts before the Native Christian Literary Society in Madras in 1871:

> The Mahabharata and the Ramayana in particular provide among the most inexhaustible and diverse stories for pictorial representation, which any country could possess.... All that is needed to promulgate their beauty and complete their fame is that in their purer and nobler passages, and with the power of European Art, they should engage the service of the national pencil as they have fastened [themselves] on the national memory and animated the national voice.... [Pillai 1928]

This nostalgia for a glorious Hindu past produced conditions for a chauvinist Hindu history of the nation. Historical and mythological figures were suddenly elevated to the status of national heroes, while Brahmins and the Hindu landed elite became the custodians of the traditional Hindu social and religious order. The attempt to designate Hindu mythology as the national history of India antagonized large segments of the Indian population belonging to other religions, particularly the Muslims. A festival introduced by Tilak in honour of Lord Ganesh, in Maharashtra, set the pattern for an ensuing conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims, right from its introduction in 1893. The Muslims objected to Hindu processions and devotional music in front of mosques, and the riots that followed led to much bloodshed in Pune and Mumbai.

The real service that Ravi Varma was asked to perform for the country was, therefore, not for all his countrymen, but for a Hindu oligarchy which, in a diffused sort of way, sought to represent Hindu interests in the politics of national liberation.

# The Beauty and the Censor

That Ravi Varma's prints were universally accepted stems from the veneer of religiosity that disguised their essentially sensuous and titillating attributes. The popularity of the early prints was doubtlessly advanced by the depiction of ravishingly beautiful women sanctified as mythological figures or goddesses, where mythic identification became a strategy to immunize the depiction of beautiful, scantily dressed women. In these pictures, the woman is often shown gathering her adornments or collecting the loose ends of her robes, shying away from a male spectator who is not part of the picture. While the viewer then takes the place of the male spectator, gazing at a forbidden object, the situation replays the voyeuristic stance of theatre, where the heroine on stage occupies the spotlight, while the audience is hidden in the dark. The dramatization of these pictures is often very forced, and not very convincing. At times the title of a print identifies the female subject as Shakuntala, and at other times as Sita left alone in the hermitage, or Damayanti lost in the forest. It is in this respect that the oleographs from the Ravi Varma Press are closest to the trivial prints of German make. While Germany had the scantily dressed 'Odalisque' in the living room of the German 'Burgher', India had the scantily adorned goddess in the prayer room of the bourgeoisie. Draped, more often than not, in diaphanous clothes that cling to a voluptuous figure, the identification of these women as mythical heroines appears to be no more than a subterfuge for their nakedness.

Ravi Varma painted nudes, but being self-taught he had never formally learnt to draw the human anatomy using nude models. Although his draped figures are quite convincing, their physique is often distorted, their stance artificial, and the foreshortening in relation to other figures often faulty. To overcome these, Ravi Varma used German and French magazines depicting nude women, men, and children in assorted 'classical' poses, which he copied and assembled into compositions. He was aware of the shortcomings of this method, and to remedy

Plate 40 Two Nudes; Oleograph, Germany, *c.*1894.

this he tried to get prostitutes to pose for him in the nude. However, as his brother's diary comments: 'With great difficulty we got a girl for a model for the painting of *At the Bath* we are painting. These prostitutes readily come if called for immoral purposes, but when required for posing they raise great objections' (Neumayer and Schelberger 1996). The painting, *At the Bath* (*see* Plate 26), depicts a young woman on the steps of a traditional Kerala bathhouse gazing coyly at the viewer, clutching her *mundu*, or short drape, to her body. The 'lady' in the painting was hailed by some critics as the embodiment of the chastity of Malayali women, while others cautioned that 'the woman ... has not the innocent looks of an unsipped blossom' (Pillai 1928).

Nudity in Indian art has its own laws of content, acceptance, and censure. It is interesting that Ravi Varma painted his women during a time when changes in traditional clothing patterns were a mark of social dissent. The 'upper cloth riots' of 1858 were uprisings against the traditional practice that demanded low-caste women to bare their torsos in the presence of a person from a higher caste. The lowering of the mundu by not just low-caste women but generally by persons of inferior social rank was a traditional gesture of respect in the Malayali society. The problem really began when neo-Christian women, who were generally members of the lower castes, started wearing blouses, inviting objections from members of the higher castes.

Under the influence of British residents and Christian missionary societies, the custom of lowering the upper garment as a mark of respect to people from a higher caste came under attack, and led to severe riots in 1829 and 1859. The riots could only be quelled by abolishing all rules prohibiting the traditional practice and allowing women from the Shenar caste (whose many members had converted to Christianity) to wear coarse cloths and '... cover their bosom in any manner whatever, but not like women of high castes' (Jacob 1990:131). Nonetheless, there remain several circulars from a succession of diwans of Travancore, who also protested against the old practice, to indicate that the upper-cloth debate still remained a bone of contention for many years to come.

It has been argued that the women in Ravi Varma's paintings seem to emanate a self-confidence associated with the matriarchal society in which Ravi Varma was bred. A *thampuran*, or the son of an aristocratic mother, he belonged to a matrilineal clan. Traditionally, the thampurans were chosen as consorts for eligible ladies from aristocratic lineages, but the relationship between them was that of a 'guest marriage', where the 'husband' never became a member of his 'wife's' lineage, although he was the father of their children. The children lived with the mother's side of the family and remained within the matriarchal lineage, which the ceremonial husband or the real father could never join (thus the saying in Kerala: a Nair does not know his father). The thampurans enjoyed—and were sanctioned—a romantic liaison with several women. However, this

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, Germany held a virtual monopoly over the production of cheap oleographic pictures, which were sold all over the world. In India, such prints (of questionable taste!) were called German prints, although many might have been produced in Austria or Italy. The imprint 'Made in Germany' was a seal for novelty and quality, and soon began appearing on Indian prints in the misleading version of 'Made as Germany'.

This print was the subject of a High Court ruling in Mumbai in 1894, indicting the sale of nude paintings, in which Ravi Varma was an eager member of the audience. The ruling of the High Court judge upheld an earlier verdict from the district court in Pune which had barred the sale of this print on account of obscenity.

The honourable judge in Mumbai declared that 'naked pictures of classical subjects were not obscene, in that, the artist had higher ideals than those of merely exciting the sensual appetites of the spectators. The pictures in question might have been classed among them, had it not been for the introduction into them of modern silk umbrellas and apparel which divested them of their idealism'. Given this ruling, the businessman from Pune had, in all probability, no difficulty in clandestinely selling the remaining stock at a premium.

Plate 41 Woodblock print from the magazine *Basantak*, Kolkata, *c.*1880.

The mock Society for the Prevention of Obscenity lampoons the intended ban on religious nudity by presenting a 'reformed' Kali—her sacrificial chopper metamorphosed into an umbrella—astride a supine Shiva, wearing a shirt and trousers held up by suspenders.

seemingly free intersexual relationship was strictly controlled by kinship groups. The mother's brother was the guardian of the children, taking the father's place. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that matrilineal inheritance laws were forced into redefining themselves in compliance with newly introduced patriarchal patterns of inheritance.

Classical Malayali literature, with its abundant and explicit sexual description of Hindu gods and goddesses, could also have influenced Ravi Varma's art. In Malayali classics, the description of a woman's beauty does not stop at looks and locks, but progresses to rhapsodize the breasts and even more intimate features of the anatomy. It should not be forgotten that Ravi Varma's breakthrough came in 1875 when, during a hunting trip, Edward, the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, saw a painting by him, of a lady sleeping under a white transparent veil, with a veena still in her arms (Rees 1891). The painting was subsequently presented to the prince. The artist later painted several copies of this painting for Indian administrators, who especially asked for it. The communication between one of them, Sir Sheshayya Shastri, diwan of Puddukottai, and Ravi Varma indicated quite clearly the aesthetic preferences of the rising Anglicized middle class:

> *Lady with Flower* is too large for my drawing room. But I would like to have a look at it. You doubt whether I would like to have *Harischandra and Taramant*. It is true, I do not like to keep paintings depicting tragic scenes in my house. I am not interested in *Mumbai Singers* which is only a social scene. By constantly looking

Plate 42 Kali; Colour lithograph, Kolkata, *c.*1870. (*see also* Plate 126)

> at your paintings, I have started admiring the pretty faces of your women. So I would like to have ... *Krishna with Gopis, Coronation of Rama* and *Sita's Swayamvara*.... I would like to have a copy of *Nair Lady inside the Mosquito Net*, which you had presented to the Prince of Wales.... [Nayar 1953]

This might bring us closer to the historical origins of Ravi Varma's seemingly radiant female forms which represented the changing taste of a de-cultured bourgeoisie elite, otherwise interested in the emancipation of Indian women through education and reform.

Revealing too are the titles of the paintings that won for Ravi Varma his early gold medals at the annual art shows in Chennai: *Nair Lady Adorning her Hair with a Garland of Jasmine* (Chennai, 1873), *A Tamil Lady Playing the Sarabat* (Chennai, 1874), *Malayalee Beauty Reclining on a Couch Beneath a Transparent Curtain* (1875). At that time no voices were raised against Ravi Varma's paintings for the freedom with which they revealed female beauty in intimate situations (*see* Plates 26–7). His paintings were circulated only amongst the upper classes, while the few public exhibitions at which they were displayed mostly featured his mythological works.

During this time in India, there were several movements that took up issues of social and political concern. Some were radical, others puritanical, even reactionary, and some downright ridiculous, to say the least. The temperance movement for instance, which campaigned against drinking and obscenity with almost absurd zeal, also sought to reform the many ills afflicting Hindu society, including sati and child marriage, propagating at the same time women's education and other noble causes. On at least one occasion, Ravi Varma was witness to a court case against obscenity when, during a ruling of the High Court of Mumbai, he was invited by Judge Ranade to attend as a spectator. This was in Mumbai at the end of 1894, when a businessman from Pune objected to the ruling of the Pune District Court debarring him from selling 'cheap German prints representing nude figures of females' (*see* Plate 40):

> The Bombay High Court upheld the verdict of the lower court even as the honourable Justices, Jardine and Ranade were of the opinion that naked pictures of classical subjects were not obscene, in that the artist had higher ideals than those of merely exciting the sensual appetites of the spectators. The pictures in question might have been classed among them, had it not been for the introduction into them of modern silk umbrellas and apparel which divested them of their idealism and dismissed the appeal. [Varma 1896]

The sitting judge, Mahadev Govind Ranade, was an important Hindu social reformer of the times, the 'clever coppersmith in his efforts to weld old and new India together', as he was lampooned in *Punch* (Mitter 1994:157). He was the leader of the temperance movement, the spearhead and

organizer of several other social reform campaigns like the anti-nautch movement, and an activist fighting against practices such as child marriage.

These were times of change, and the Ravi Varma Press soon ventured into the production and distribution of thousands upon thousands of prints, blending eroticism with classical themes, circumnavigating the same crags of scant apparel and silk umbrellas upon which the German pictures were marooned, with no thread left to cover the female form. Ravi Varma's well-crafted methods of immunizing his work against the sensual appetite of the censorship included not merely giving sacred titles to his beauties, but also painting portraits of a good number of High Court judges donning their wigs and robes.

Moreover, who could dare challenge the depiction of the raging Goddess Kali in her glorious nakedness (*see* Plates 42–3, 124, 126), clad not in silken attire but garlands of intestines, severed heads and limbs, and a tongue dripping with blood. Who was there to prevent Krishna from stealing the clothes of the *gopis*, returning them only to those who uncovered their nakedness with hands clasped above their foreheads in adoration. Krishna continued to play pranks on everyone while enchanting the believers with his magic flute, and there was no judge to censor that (*see* Plates 53–4).

Yet, from time to time there was censure of sanctified icons, though only to find itself lampooned as a mock Society for the Prevention of Obscenity in the Kolkata newspaper *Basantak*, as it stood censoring the goddess herself. The cartoon shows a great reformed Shakti, donned in a long skirt and frilled apron over a tight bodice and ankle-long unmentionables, wielding an umbrella instead of a sacrificial knife and a handbag instead of a skull cup, but still retaining the obligatory chain of human (male) skulls. She is astride her reclining husband, the great Shiva who is donned in tight-fitting tweed trousers held in place by suspenders. The caricature must have certainly amused the Bengali *babus* of the 1880s or so (*see* Plate 41)!

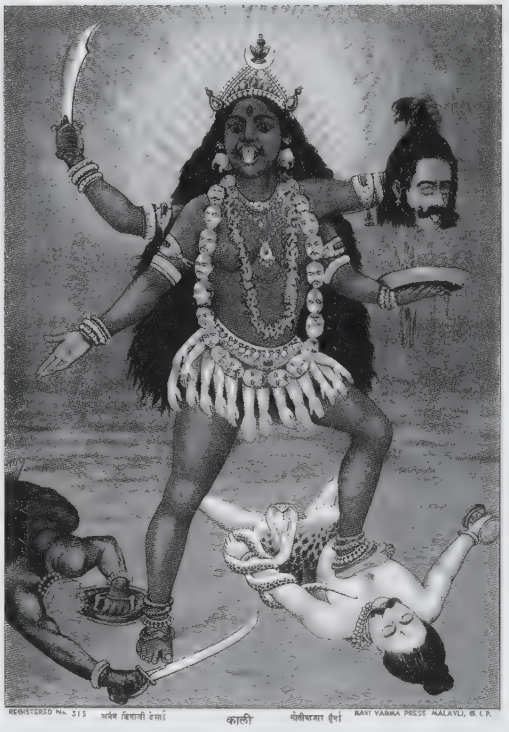


Plate 43 Goddess Kali; Oleograph, Ravi Varma Press, *c.*1900.

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# Matchsticks, Fireworks, and Icons

Saturating the Indian population with visuals was a slow process. Since display prints were expensive during the initial years, it was first the urban population, particularly the bazaar bourgeoisie, who bought such prints to deck their business premises and prayer rooms. Soon thereafter, advertisements and labels carrying the same images robbed them of their status of novelty and prestige. The labels of pre-packaged goods like soaps, tobacco, tea, textiles, and medicines were recycled as colourful visuals of the new world, but this time without boundaries. These pictures found their way into every hut in India where their functions were recategorized into the 'sacral' and 'profane', and used accordingly. To this day these labels are found pasted within cabinets housing altars, stitched to the frills of ceremonial door curtains, or put to other decorative uses.

It was in the 1930s that Sivakasi, a small town in South India, became the centre of a printing industry. It all began with a local schoolteacher who printed notebooks, and two brothers who started a matchstick cottage industry. Sivakasi grew to become the centre of the matchstick and fireworks industry, while the printing industry grew alongside to cater to the consequent burgeoning demand for wrappers and labels. When one of the printers presented his customers with a print carrying the logo of his establishment and a calendar for the New Year, a new medium was born. Soon a whole industry was busy printing, distributing, and selling calendars.

Calendar art is so archetypal of India that, in the country, it has become the generic name of popular art as a whole. It is the popular modern art of India that has developed its own generic codes. Its distribution network reaches even the smallest localities, distributing views from a virtual into the real world. This transfer has now taken hold of every visual medium, so much so as to become one of the many Indian meta-realities which, in a travesty of social engineering, transforms the real world in its own image.

Plate 44 Designs for calendar prints of the 1960s and 70s from the store of a picture merchant in Delhi.

A visitor to India is immediately conscious of the all-embracing presence of this aesthetic, which not only pervades the private spheres of Indian life, but also spills over into the public domain. 'Filmi' advertisements, religious icons, and political propaganda comprise a collage that bedecks the urban Indian landscape distinguishable by its betel-stained plastered walls, where circus posters mingle with greenish handbill-sized VD advertisements, bumper sale and local cricket notifications, and political canvassing for electoral candidates— and it all began about one hundred years ago when the Ravi Varma Press began its crusade for the industrialization of the Indian image.

High-speed lithographic presses brought in from Germany by Ravi Varma were kept busy till they were replaced by offset machines about sixty years later. The master stones—the invaluable capital of the press—were retained till 1972 when a devastating fire burnt down the workshop and machines, and spelt the demise of the factory that had shaped India's modern pictorial aesthetics more than anything else.

Many of the original litho stones still lie scattered as cobblestone around the abandoned premises of the press, the fading shades of gods still visible on some, others trodden smooth by striding soles.

# Plates

*Plates 45–6*

Sarasvati is the Goddess of music and learning, and her vahana is the swan. In keeping with her image as a goddess of beauty, Ravi Varma endowed her with the peacock as her vahana, changing thereby an element of traditional iconography.

Sarasvati was soon accepted in the rendering of Ravi Varma as the tutelary deity of the British educational system. Cast in clay and other material, she became the goddess worshipped by Indian students prior to their examinations and adorned the new temples of learning and art, which included museums, theatres, and cinema halls.

The names of Ravi Varma's mythological heroines were offen interchanged in different versions of the same painting.

Plate 45 Sarasvati; Oleograph, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1883.

Plate 46 Sarasvati; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

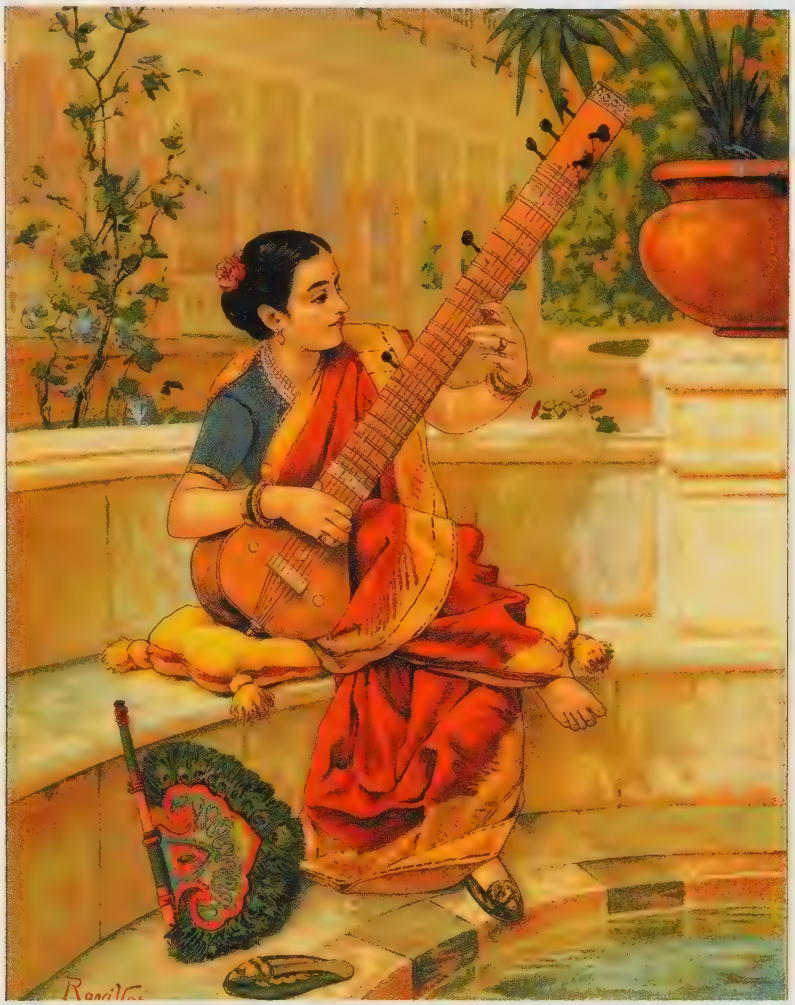

Plate 47 Kadambari; Oleograph, *c.*1895; Painting by C. Raja Raja Varma (n.d.).

Plate 48 Tara Devi; Oleograph, *c.*1895; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma (n.d.).

Plate 49 Nagapuja; Oleograph, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1883.

Nagapuja, or snake-worship, is a rural festival celebrated at the end of the rainy season. In return for a token gift, snake-charmers wander from house to house and present their serpents to the matron.

Plate 50 Mohini; Oleograph with silver application, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1895.

*Plates 51–2*

The story of Shakuntala belongs to one of the oldest literary traditions of India. Its most famous version is the poetic play by Kalidasa, a sixth-century poet who lived in the city of Ujjain. The story centres around Shakuntala—the foster-daughter of a hermit, and the real daughter of the heavenly nymph Menaka and the sage Vishvamitra—and her love for King Dushyanta. When she is born, Vishvamitra refuses to even look at her, since she is a reminder of his having succumbed to carnal desire. Shakuntala's parents abandon her in a forest, where she is protected by a bird until she is discovered by her foster-father.

Grown to maidenhood, she meets King Dushyanta, who trespasses into the sacred grove during a hunt, and they fall in love. When the duties of the state recall him to his capital, Dushyanta presents Shakuntala with a bracelet as a token of his love.

Fate, however, wills otherwise. An angry sage casts a curse on Shakuntala that her lover will forget her. Shakuntala waits for Dushyanta's return in vain. Pregnant with Dushyanta's child, she makes her way to the king's court. Her story is received with suspicion, and she returns to her hermitage where she gives birth to a son, whom she names Bharata. It is after several years and tribulations that the king recognizes his son and accepts Shakuntala as one of his queens. Bharata is the ancestor of the famous clan of the Bharatas which gives India its ancient name, Bharat.

The drama was one of the earliest Indian themes to be received in Europe with much enthusiasm, where it became one of the most influential works for the German romantic movement of the nineteenth century.

Plate 51 Birth of Shakuntala; Oleograph with tinsel retouch, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1890.

Sage Vishvamitra refuses to see his daughter Shakuntala.

*facing page*

Shakuntala, her thoughts full of longing for her lover, does not welcome Sage Durvasa to her abode. Outraged, he curses her for this affront by saying that the one she was thinking about shall forget her.

While some editions of this print were entitled *Shakuntala and Durvasa*, others were called *Sita in the Forest Hermitage*.

Plate 52 Shakuntala and Durvasa; Oleograph, *c.*1895; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma, 1873.

*Plates 53–4*

Krishna's dalliance with the milkmaids opened wide vistas for the depiction of erotic themes. He is notorious for the pranks he played on the milkmaids of Brindavan, stealing and hanging their clothes on the branches of a tree upon which he sat playing his flute while they bathed in the Yamuna. The clothes were returned only to those who stepped out of the water and offered him a salutation with their hands folded above their heads.

The depiction of nude gopis could not be challenged by the censors as long as the painting was protected by a veneer of religiosity. Nudity in cinema, however, was forbidden. Plate 54 shows a still from a mythological silent movie of the time. The gopis are shown fully dressed, although some of their wet saris cling revealingly to their bodies.

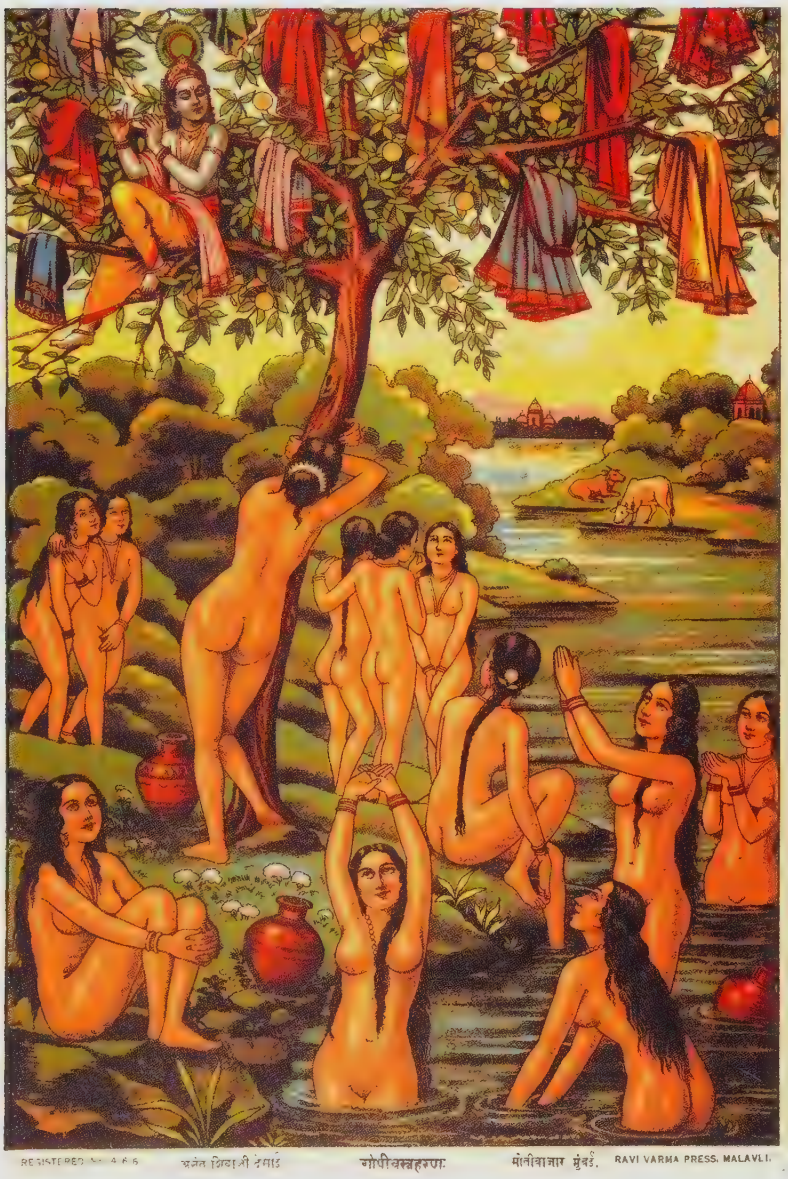


Plate 53 Gopi Vastra Haran (Stealing the clothes of the gopis); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

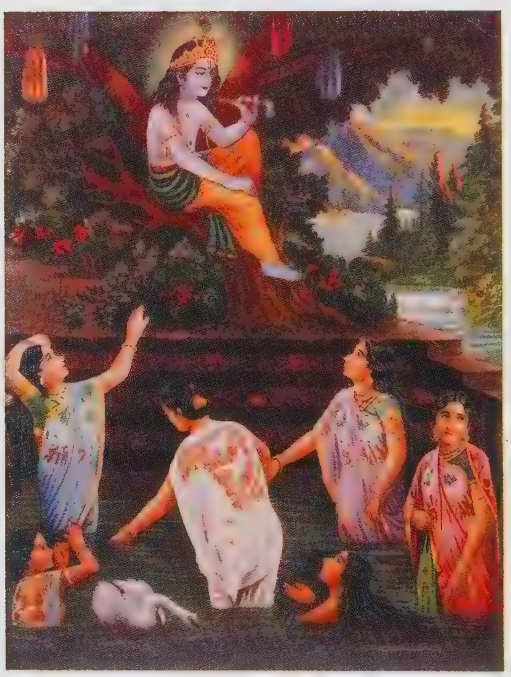


Plate 54 Gopi Vastra Haran (Stealing the clothes of the gopis); Half-tone print, *c.*1930.

*Plates 55–6*

One of India's most ancient deities, Lakshmi is the Goddess of Plenty. As Padma or Padmini, the Goddess of the Lotus, she has been worshipped for over 2000 years. Although considered as the consort of Vishnu, she is very much an independent deity—the tutelary goddess of businessmen who worship her during Lakshmi Puja or at the start of the new financial year when new account books are opened. Lakshmi is generally placed in a primeval landscape, flanked by two elephants jetting water, gold, or milk over her as symbols of abundance.

During the twentieth century, when the means of riches were to be found more in the capital markets of the cities, Lakshmi too was brought out and placed against a cityscape. The origin of the cityscape as an environment fit for gods goes back to a print of the Hindu monk, Vivekananda, who is shown standing in front of the high-rise skyline of Chicago, where he, along with several other holy men, participated in the Parliament of Religions during the World Colombian Exposition in 1893.

Plate 55 Lakshmi; Oleograph, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma (n.d.).

Plate 56 Shree Sharada Pujan (Lakshmi, Sarasvati, and Ganesh); Oleograph, *c.*1930.

Goddess Lakshmi standing on a lotus, flanked by Sarasvati and Ganesh, placed against the backdrop of a cityscape. The oleograph carries the misleading impression, 'Made as Germany'.

*Plates 57–9*

The urban bazaar class was the first recipient of industrially produced pictures. The aesthetics of advertisements and labels on pre-packed goods were a strong impetus for the development of this medium. The prints of shop interiors in their art-deco design served as windows into a new world in places which, for a long time to come, would not know of such establishments.

Plate 57 Cloth Shop; Half-tone print, 1940.

Plate 58 Sold on Credit, Sold for Cash; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Plate 59 Jewellery Shop; Half-tone print, *c.*1940.

*facing page*

An advertisement for *bidi*, the indigenous form of Indian cigarettes.

Plate 60 Sales Girl; Half-tone print, 1939.

Plate 61 Ganapati; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

*Plates 61–3*

Ganesh is the remover of obstacles and is therefore invoked before the commencement of any enterprise or business. The son of Shiva, he is also considered to be the God of Wisdom. His vahana is the mouse.

Although Ganesh is an ancient deity, his current popularity can be attributed to the end of the nineteenth century when Tilak initiated Ganesh Chaturthi, a Hindu nationalistic festival in honour of Ganesh.

Plate 62 Ganápati; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Plate 63 Mushaka Ganapati; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Ganesha in the traditional form as he is found enshrined in small home-sanctuaries. The style of the modern display prints, which portrayed the gods in an anthropomorphic form in a naturalistic environment, was not immediately accepted. Soon there appeared prints that had the distinct stylistic flavour of south Indian bazaar paintings. In these prints, the gods maintained their iconic form, although the figures of deities were drawn more naturalistically and placed on pedestals or cases framed in the likeness of sacral architecture.

*Plates 64–73*

In the trinity of the great gods, Brahma–Shiva–Vishnu, Vishnu is considered to be the sustainer. He is the adversary of the demons who continually seek to usurp the power of the gods. In his struggle against the demons, he assumes ten major avatars or incarnations: Matsya the fish; Kurma, the tortoise; Varaha, the boar; Narasimha, the man-lion; Vamana, the dwarf; Parashuram, the axe-man; Rama, the bowman; Krishna, the cowherd; Balaram, the ploughman (replaced in the northern tradition by Buddha, the sage); and finally, Kalki, the horseman.

Several of these incarnations are in themselves considered to be independent gods who have their own myths and incarnations. The more important of these are Krishna and Rama.

When creation ceases, Vishnu rests on the coils of the snake Sheshnag, where his two consorts are Lakshmi and Sri. His vahana is the sun-eagle Garuda.

Plate 64 Vishnu on Sheshnag; Oleograph, 1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma (n.d.).

Plate 65 Vishnu; Oleograph, *c.*1925.

This print is embroidered with beadwork in silver, and real silk is stitched over the printed robe of the God. Such 'dressed' pictures were also fashionable in Germany during the nineteenth century.

*facing page*

Vishnu on Garuda with his consorts, Lakshmi and Sri, by his side.

Plate 66 Vishnu Enthroned on Garuda; Oleograph, *c.*1900; Painting by Raja Ravi Varma (n.d.).

Plate 67 Vishnu Reclining on Sheshnag; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Vishnu resting between aeons on the coils of Sheshnag. From his navel grows the lotus, the throne of Brahma. At his feet are Rama and Garuda—his vahana, and his consort, Sri.

Plate 68 Matsya Avatar; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

Vishnu in his incarnation as a fish that saved mankind from the deluge.

facing page

Vishnu in his incarnation as a tortoise that served as a pivot for Mount Mandara. Mandara was used as a churning-rod during the churning of the ocean from which the gods and the demons acquired *amrit*, the elixir of immortality.

Plate 69 Kurma Avatar; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

Plate 70 Narasimha; Half-tone print, *c.*1965.

Plate 71 Narasimha; Colour lithograph, *c.*1870.

*facing page*

Vishnu assumed the form of Narasimha to battle the demon Hiranyakashipu, who Brahma had rendered invincible for he could not be destroyed either during the day or at night; not be vanquished in the open, or under a roof; and not be overcome by man or animal, neither on earth nor in heaven. He was finally destroyed by Narasimha, the man-lion, who appeared at dawn from a split pillar, on to the verandah, where he disembowelled his adversary in mid air.

Plate 72 Balaram Avatar; Colour lithograph, *c.*1870.

Krishna's half-brother, Balaram is an ancient agricultural deity. His insignia is the plough, and therefore he is also addressed as Halali, or the Ploughman.

Plate 73 Vamana Avatar; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

*Plates 73–90*

Krishna is the adversary of his demon uncle, Kamsa, and the son of Devaki, Kamsa's sister, and Vasudeva, her husband. A prophecy discloses Devaki and Vasudeva as parents of the future destroyer of Kamsa, who had usurped the throne of his father, Ugrasena. To counter the augury, Kamsa keeps Vasudeva and Devaki imprisoned, and puts to death all their offspring.

However, and not without divine intervention, Vasudeva is able to leave the prison with Krishna on the night he is born. He crosses the river Yamuna by night, making his way to Gokul, a village inhabited by the pastoral tribe of the Yadavs. At Gokul, he exchanges Krishna with a girl born to the herdsman, Nanda, and his wife, Yashoda, on the same night. This girl-child is an incarnation of the Devi herself, and when Kamsa lifts her up to fling her down, she disappears, but not without telling him that his destroyer is still alive. Outraged, Kamsa proceeds to have all the male infants in and around the kingdom killed.

Meanwhile, Krishna grows up in the house of his foster parents and among the cowherds of the Yadava tribe. He soon becomes the favourite of all the milkmaids in the tribe, capturing their hearts and beguiling them with the magical notes of his flute.

Back at the kingdom of Mathura, Kamsa continues to form schemes to kill Krishna. A multitude of demons and monsters are sent after him, all of whom are either killed or subdued by Krishna's godlike strength and guile. Finally, in a direct encounter at a wrestling combat, Krishna and Balaram kill their uncle (*see* Plate 89), free their parents from the prison, and restore the throne to the rightful king, Ugrasena.

After Kamsa is destroyed, Krishna and his Yadava-tribe migrate from Mathura to Dwarka, at the western tip of the Saurashtra peninsula. (This layer of the myth of Krishna possibly alludes to a historic event: the migration to western India of a pastoral tribe during the proto-historic period.)

In the great epic, Mahabharata, Krishna plays an important role as Arjuna's charioteer and spiritual guide. When Arjuna flounders at the sight of the large armies ready for battle, he begins to question the sanity and righteousness of war, and the imminent slaughter and bloodshed for the cause of power. Krishna then reveals his true form to Arjuna as the godhead who encompasses the entire universe (*see* Plate 90). He delivers a sermon to Arjuna on the duty of action, elaborating on *Karmayoga*, the Yoga of Action. This treatise from the great epic Mahabharata, elaborated in the Bhagavad Gita, has become a central epistle of modern Hinduism.

Krishna meets his end following a murderous drunken brawl in which his son, as well as most of the Yadava chiefs, die. Balaram, who did not participate in the brawl, dies peacefully under a tree, while Krishna is felled by an arrow released inadvertently by Jara, a hunter who mistakes Krishna's heel for the eye of a deer (*see* Plate 146). Soon after, the city of Dwarka was swallowed by the sea.

Legends of Krishna were also known to classical Greek writers who wrote on India. His heroic deeds were compared to the labours of Hercules. A picture of Krishna and Balaram also appears on Indo-Greek coinage of the second century BC.

*facing page*

In his incarnation as Vamana, Vishnu asumes the form of a dwarf-sized Brahman, who begs from the mighty and arrogant king, Bali, only as much land as he is able to traverse in three strides. This assured, Vamana, in his first stride, encompasses the world; in the second, the rest of the universe; and in his third stride, he places his foot upon the head of the mighty king himself, shattering his arrogance and pride.

Plate 74 Shri Bal Mukund (Child Krishna); Half-tone print, *c.*1960.

More than any other incarnation of Vishnu, Krishna is perceived as an independent god. As analogous to Vishnu resting between the aeons in the coils of Sheshnag (*see* Plate 67), Krishna is depicted here floating on a pipal leaf over the Ocean of Eternity.

*facing page*

Krishna playing on his magic flute. The style of this print follows closely the style of popular glass painting, which came into fashion during the latter half of the nineteenth century in South India.

Plate 75 Venugopala (Krishna, the cowherd); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Plate 76 Krishna and Yashoda; Oleograph, *c.* 1900.

Krishna grows up with the cowherds of Brindavan, as a favourite of all. He is adored by the milkmaids, on whom he plays his boyish pranks. Together with his equally mischievous friends, he devastates the dairy, stealing butter and curd. A fond epithet for him is *makhan-chor*, the butter-thief.

Plate 77 The Birth of Krishna; Half-tone print, *c.*1940.

Vasudeva carries the newborn Krishna across the waters of the Yamuna to safety. The serpent, Sheshnag, protects him from the lashing rain.

Plate 79 Balakrishna (Child Krishna); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Krishna eating a popular Indian sweetmeat, the *laddu*. By his side are Nanda and Yashoda, his foster parents. The style of this print imitates the then popular bazaar pictures, which were sold during the latter part of the nineteenth century in southern India.

Plate 78 Krishna, the butter-thief; Half-tone print, *c.*1935.

Krishna and Balaram stealing from the dairy.

Plate 80 Woodward's Gripe Water Keeps Babies Healthy; Oleograph, *c.*1930.

Krishna, here a rather fat European baby in a European interior, plays with apples and grapes rather than butter and *laddoos*, the traditional Indian sweetmeats.

Plate 81 Balakrishna; Half-tone print, *c.*1935.

*facing page*

One of Krishna's feats was the subjugation of the king of snakes, Kaliya, who had taken over the Yamuna, poisoning its waters and devastating trees and other vegetation on the banks. When the cowherds and their cattle could no longer approach the river for water, Krishna dived into the water and fought Kaliya. Forcing him to the surface, he danced upon his hood, and would have trampled him to death had Kaliya's queens not begged Krishna to spare him. Krishna consented but forced Kaliya and his clan to find a new abode in the ocean.

This print is an advertisement for Gripe Water from Woodward's, a firm in London. The advertisement uses the theme of *Kaliyamardan*—the subjugation of the snake-king, Kaliya, by Krishna—to reach out to an Indian audience. The theme also finds a parallel in the firm's logo, which shows Hercules throttling the snakes. The logo is, in turn, an adaptation of a painting by Joshua Reynolds.

Plate 82 Radha Krishna; Half-tone print, *c.*1935

Plate 83 Krishna with Parrot; Half-tone print, *c.*1940.

*facing page*

The lovers, Radha and Krishna, in the style of the movies of the early 1930s. These prints were widely distributed during that time, partly as advertisements of mythological movies, but also for their value as religious icons.

Plate 84 Rukmini and Krishna; Oleograph, *c.*1925.

Krishna and his wife Rukmini in the style of popular bazaar art.

In the bazaars of metropolitan Indian cities, paintings on paper and glass were sold. Courtly and local traditions mingled with styles and modes brought to India by imports, and which were re-adapted for local consumption. Here, art was remoulded in accordance with urban fancies and tastes, and open to aesthetic influences from all directions: European genre painting, Chinese painting on glass which was imported from the Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia, and, of course, the many indigenous Indian art traditions.

Paintings by traditional artists were frequently reproduced by the smaller lithographic presses, which played an important role in reintroducing traditional designs and styles into the otherwise highly industrialized picture-production process.

Although painters were familiar with certain conventions of European naturalistic painting, the struggle for the depiction of perspective led, at times, to ingenious solutions, as can be seen in the positioning of the pillars.

Plate 85 Krishna; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Krishna with Radha, an incarnation of Lakshmi. The print comes from the Delhi Lithographic Press of Hemchander Bhargava, who had employed craftsmen from Udaipur, in Rajasthan. These craftsmen brought with them their own stylistic and cultural conventions, which are evident in the dress patterns.

Plate 86 Radha and Krishna; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

*facing page*

Krishna and his eternal beloved, Radha, framed by an extraordinarily ornate and theatrical piece of architecture, resembling studio props from theatre and film productions of the period. Here, Krishna is teaching Radha to play his magic flute.

Plate 87 Radha and Krishna; Oleograph, *c.*1935.

Plate 88 Krishna on the Banks of the Yamuna; Oleograph, 1935.

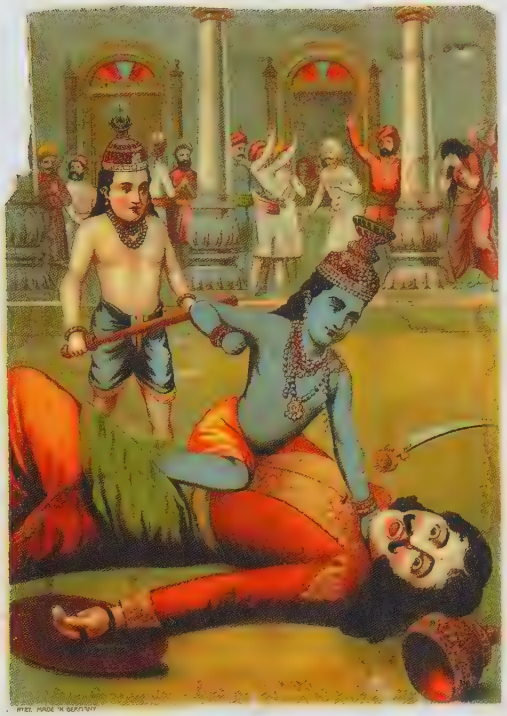

Plate 89 Krishna and his brother, Balaram, killing the demon Kamsa during a wrestling contest; Oleograph, printed before 1900; Inscribed 'Made in Germany'.

After his many efforts to kill Krishna failed, Kamsa invited Krishna and Balaram to witness some sports in the city of Mathura. The event was yet another one of Kamsa's ploys to rid himself of Krishna. He arranges for two huge wrestlers and an elephant to attack the brothers, but Krishna and Balaram not only kill the wrestlers and the elephant, but also finally, Kamsa as well.

Krishna and Balaram are said to be the offspring of a white and a black strand of hair from Vishnu's head, and are therefore accounted for as incarnations of Vishnu. Brought up amidst the cowherds of Brindavan, their daring exploits belong to the popular lore of India. During the classical period, Balaram was worshipped as an agricultural god and as the guardian deity of wine.

Plate 90 Visvarupa; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Krishna displays his true form to Arjuna, who is dismayed at the prospect of fighting the overwhelmingly large army of the Kauravas in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The story of the fratricidal war constitutes the thematic centre of the great Indian epic, the Mahabharata.

*facing page*

Krishna painted here in the style of the popular art of Nathadwara, a centre of the Krishna cult in Rajasthan.

*Plates 91–104*

Rama is considered to be the human incarnation of Vishnu, and is the deified hero of the Ramayana. He was the heir to the throne of Ayodhya, and the son of King Dasratha and Queen Kaushalya. The king had two other queens, who bore him three more sons—the twins, Shatrughana and Lakshman, the twins, and Bharata.

A court intrigue sent Rama into exile for fourteen years. His wife, Sita, and his brother, Lakshman, followed him, leaving Bharata to rule the kingdom in Rama's absence.

During their exile, Rama, Sita, and Lakshman wandered through the forests of India. One day, Surpanakha, the sister of the demon king, Ravana, met Rama in the forest and fell in love with him. After several unsuccessful attempts at trying to seduce him, she tried to swallow Sita, who she believed was the real obstacle. Rama ordered Lakshman to disfigure Surpanakha by cutting off her nose, sowing the seeds of an abiding enmity between himself and Ravana (*see* Plate 96).

Ravana, in order to avenge his sister's disfigurement, succeeded in spiriting Sita off to his kingdom, Lanka (*see* Plates 97–8). Following an arduous quest, Rama and Lakshman learnt of Sita's abduction, and were able to contact her with the help of their faithful ally, Hanuman, the general of the army of monkeys. After several adventures, Rama attacked Lanka with Hanuman's army (*see* Plate 99–102), and after many a duel, killed Ravana and rescued his wife. Soon after, Rama, Sita, and Lakshman returned to Ayodhya, where Rama was finally crowned the king (*see* Plate 104). Sita's ordeals, however, were not over. She had to furnish proof of her innocence to disprove tainting rumours about her chastity whilst she was imprisoned at the court of Ravana. When, even after this, the voices of suspicion were not silenced, she returned to her mother, the Earth.

Legends about Rama are very popular in northern India, and of the many versions that exist, the most popular is attributed to the sage, Valmiki.

Ayodhya, a city in north India, is traditionally considered the true location of Rama's birth. The Mughal Emperor, Babur, is said to have had a mosque built there, which has long been a focal point of dissent in the fragile relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims of north India. In 1992, an orchestrated mob of frenzied Hindu fanatics stormed the mosque and destroyed it. The political fallout of this incident has aggravated the animosity between these two major religious communities in South Asia.

Plate 91 Rama; Half-tone print, 1934.

Rama depicted in the style of contemporary theatre and film productions.

Plate 92 Rama; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Rama as a youthful bowman in a peculiar over-decorated style, reminiscent of the Persian paintings of the early nineteenth century from the Quajar Dynasty.

Plate 93 Birth of Sita; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Sita, whose name means 'furrow', was the daughter of King Janaka. She sprang forth from an egg which Janaka found in a furrow he drew during a plough ceremony. The Earth is therefore considered her mother.

Plate 94 Ravana with Shiva's Bow; Oleograph, 1915.

King Janaka holds a *swayamvara* to find a suitable husband for his daughter, Sita. One of the challenges in this contest is to string the mighty bow of Shiva. None of the competitors succeed—even Ravana is thrown to the ground while flexing the bow. When it is Rama's turn, he not only strings the bow, but snaps it into two, winning Sita's hand.

Plate 95 Ram and Sita; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

One of the early oleographs printed by the Hemchander Bhargava Press in New Delhi. The press employed traditional painters from Rajasthan as lithographers.

*facing page*

Rama and Lakshman repulse Surpanakha's amorous advances and even disfigure her when she tries to swallow Sita.

Plate 96 Surpanakha; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Plate 97 Ravana Fighting Jatayu; Oleograph *c.*1900; Painting by Ravi Varma, 1895.

Jatayu, the King of Birds, witnesses the abduction of Sita and attacks Ravana in an attempt to save her, but Ravana wounds him lethally. The dying bird later informs Rama and Lakshman of the direction Sita's abductor had taken.

Plate 98 The Abduction of Sita; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Ravana flies towards Lanka after abducting Sita, who throws down her jewels to indicate to her husband the direction of their flight. Sugreeva, the king of the tribe of monkeys, finds the ornaments and informs Rama when he reaches the domain of the monkeys.

Plate 99 Hanuman Caught by Ravana; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Hanuman took a giant leap from India across the ocean to Lanka, where he conveyed to Sita the news that her husband and his army were on their way to rescue her. He was captured by the guards at Ravana's palace, and brought before Ravana, where his tail was set alight (*see also* Plate 101).

*Plates 99–102*

Hanuman was the son of a celestial nymph and the wind god. He eventually became the most trusted friend of Rama, and led the retinue of monkeys and other troops during Rama's invasion of the island of Lanka, where Sita was held captive by Ravana.

Hanuman is one of the most popular Hindu deities, worshipped by people with widely divergent caste backgrounds. He is seen from time to time as a national deity, fighting on the side of the voiceless and oppressed.

Plate 100 Hanuman; Oleograph, *c.*1930.

Hanuman, depicted as a brawny Mr India standing above the globe and the contours of the Indian peninsula, occupies a place comparable with Bharat Mata.

Plate 101 Hanuman Setting Lanka Ablaze; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

His tail ablaze, Hanuman leaps from roof to roof of the buildings of Lanka, setting them on fire.

Plate 102 The Bridge to Lanka; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Hanuman and his army of monkeys build a bridge of floating stones across the ocean towards the island of Lanka, where Ravana holds Sita captive. The devoted monkeys inscribe the name of Rama on every single stone.

*facing page*

When Sagar, the God of the Ocean, brought up waves to prevent Rama from crossing the expanse of the ocean towards Lanka, Rama sat in meditation to subdue him. When the ocean did not yield, Rama threatened Sagar with his never-failing shafts.

During the early days of the nationalist movement, Rama was invariably shown as a young effeminate deity. This painting by Ravi Varma is perhaps one of the first attempts to project Rama as a martial hero.

More recently, the iconography of Rama has once again been transformed to meet the requirements of Hindu chauvinists. He is now depicted as a bold and brawny warrior who wields his bow against the foes of Hinduism.

*Sethubandanam* was part of the last commission of nine paintings, which Ravi Varma painted for the new palace of Mysore in 1905. Legend has it that when he painted the clouds in the background, a shaft of lightning struck out of the blue in Kilimanoor, where the painter was working.

Ravi Varma
REGISTERED Nº 210 THE RAVI-VARMA-PRESS PICTURE DEPOT, राम सागर दर्प हरण. (1928.) BOMBAY. RAVI-VARMA-PRESS. MALAVLI-LONAVL

Plate 103 Sethubandanam (Rama Subduing the Ocean); Oleograph, 1905; Painting by Ravi Varma, 1905.

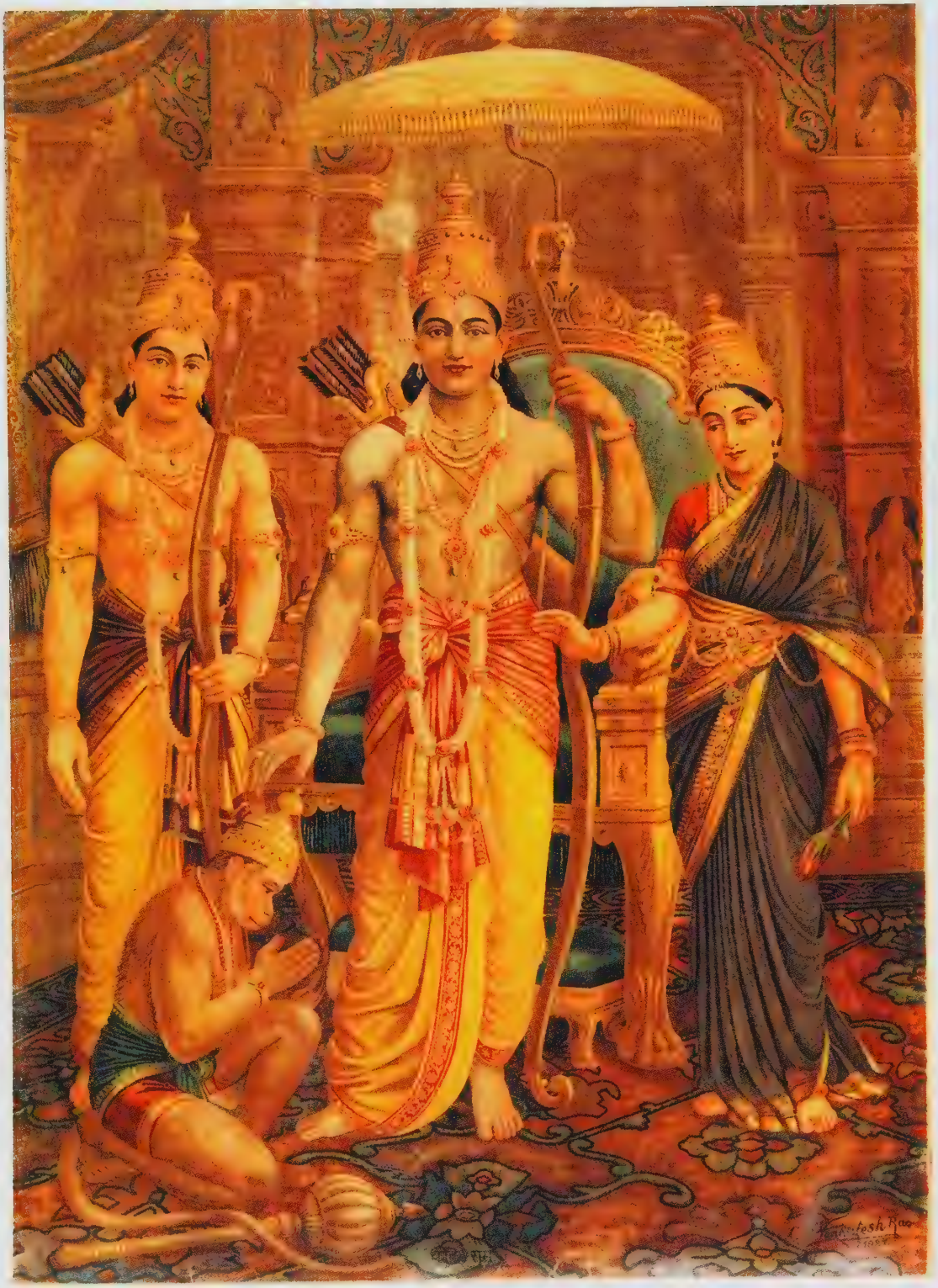

Plate 104 Rama; Oleograph, 1927.

Plate 105 Shiva and Parvati as Hunters; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

*Plates 105–16*

Shiva, also called Mahadev or the Great God, contains within himself many contradictions. He is the God of Contemplation and at the same time, the God of Ecstasy. His mythology borrows from divergent strands of legends, many of which were thought to be too dark and sensual to befit a god during the nineteenth century. It is therefore not surprising that his sexual escapades were interpreted more in 'spiritual' terms while the rustic and popular was declared as a travesty of the spiritual.

Several nineteenth-century reformers strove to interpret Hinduism as a closed and codified religion at par with other religions of the book (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), which had a fairly homogenous body of codified laws. During this time, original scriptures in Sanskrit were still in the process of being edited and made available to a wider audience—above all, to the urban middle class. The iconography of Shiva did not easily lend itself to domesticated refinement, where he could be projected as a redeemer in the same way as Vishnu, who was sometimes portrayed in the manner of a Christian saviour. Nationalistic iconography, however, found it easier to draw its role models more from Shaivite mythology. Involved in revenge and sacrifice, Shaivite deities were better catalysts for conveying the colonial antagonism between the ruler and the ruled.

Plate 106 Kashi Vishvanath (Shiva); Oleograph, *c.*1900.

Shiva with a serpent and *rudraksha* around his neck. From his long matted hair, Goddess Ganga spouts her waters upon the earth.

Prints of this kind were ordered by large temples at famous pilgrim centres, like the Vishvanath Temple in Varanasi, and sold in large numbers.

*facing page*

Rama, Lakshman, and Sita before the throne of Ayodhya, with Hanuman kneeling before them.

Plate 107 The Temptation of Shiva; Oleograph, c.1900.

Plate 108 Shiva and Parvati; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

Parvati is the daughter of Himalaya, and the consort of Shiva. Their home is believed to be on the frozen peaks of the Himalayas.

Plate 109 Annapurna (Goddess of Food); Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Shiva, the unreliable ascetic who more often than not fails to provide for his family, is finally left by his wife, Parvati (Annapurna). As a mendicant begging from door to door he also stumbles on the threshold of his father-in-law's home, where his estranged wife provides him with food.

*facing page*

Shiva's contemplation was so intense that nature stopped procréation and life came to a standstill. When Kama, the God of Love, sought to wake Shiva from this state of tranquillity, he was burnt to ashes by a glance from Shiva's third eye.

When Vishnu, the sustainer, saw creation in danger, he himself assumed the form of a nymph who distracted Shiva. Aroused from his yogic stupor, Shiva was in immediate pursuit of the woman. From that moment onward, nature again sprang forth, and procreation and decay were once again set in motion.

Plate 110 Aradhanareshwar; Half-tone print, *c.*1970.

Plate 111 Shiva and Parvati with Ganesh and Kartikeya; Half-tone print, *c.*1935.

One day Ganesh challenges his brother Kartikeya to compete with him in a race around the universe. While Kartikeya takes off on his peacock to encircle the globe, Ganesh, the ardent and devoted son of Shiva and Parvati, merely walks around his parents' throne since, for him, they constitute his entire universe. Pleased with his cunning and devotion, Shiva hands Ganesh a mango for a prize.

Plate 112 Ravana Shaking Mount Kailash; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

With intense meditation and rigorous ascetic practices, Ravana acquired so much power that he could challenge the suzerainty of the gods. However, when he attemps to shake Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva and Parvati, Shiva subdues him with no more than the touch of his toe.

*facing page*

Shiva and Parvati as an androgynous deity acquire the name of Aradhanareshwar. Both their vahanas or mounts are standing by: Nandi, Shiva's bull, and Simha, Parvati's lion.

*Plates 114–16*

Ganga, it is believed, was originally the Milky Way. It was only after Sage Bhagirath's rigorous penance that the gods agreed to send her down to Earth. Bhagirath's intention in bringing Ganga down was to spread the sacred water of the goddess over the sepulchres of his ancestors and so release their souls.

Ganga's descent would have smashed the earth had not Shiva caught her waters in his matted hair, from where the many different streams gently flowed down his locks to the earth.

Ganga herself took her abode in Shiva's hair, while her waters followed Bhagirath's steps all the way through India, to meet the sea at the Bay of Bengal.

Plate 113 Shiva and Parvati in *Om*; Half-tone print, *c.*1965.

Shiva, Parvati, and Ganesh enthroned on a lotus. A serpent coiled in the shape of the all-embracing syllable 'Om' (ॐ) forms the backdrop.

Goddess Ganga on her vahana, Makar, the crocodile. In front of her is the sage, Bhagirath.

Plate 114 Ganga and Bhagirath; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Plate 115 Parvati and Nandi; Preparatory sketch for *Gangavataran*, 1894.

Plate 116 Gangavataran (Descent of Ganga); Oleograph, *c.*1900.

Ravi Varma painted a number of mythological themes for the decoration of the palaces in Mysore and Baroda. Printed at the Ravi Varma Press, these pictures became extremely popular. Several of the preliminary sketches for this painting have survived in one of Ravi Varma's sketchbooks. The painting *Gangavataran* or the 'Descent of Ganga' was one of the earliest oleographs printed in the Ravi Varma Press.

*Plates 117–19*

Subramanyam, the second son of Shiva and Parvati, is also known as Kartikeya or Skanda. His birth was a somewhat complicated affair, planned by the gods to subdue a demon who had challenged their power. He is therefore known as the General of the celestial. His *vahana*, or mount, is the peacock.

Kartikeya has six heads, since he was born of six mothers and assembled after birth. As Subramanyam, he is one of the most popular gods of south India. His is an ancient iconography, found on Indo-Greek coinage in north-western India over 2000 years ago.

Plate 117 Sheshmukh Subramanyam (Six-headed Subramanyam); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

This print is in the idiom of the bazaar paintings which were popular during the second half of the nineteenth century in Mysore, Tanjore, and several other cities in south India.

Plate 118 Dandayudhapani (Balasubramanyam or Child-Subramanyam); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

*facing page*

A print especially produced for the temple of Palani, one of the most important sanctuaries of Kartikeya in south India.

Plate 119 Sri Balasubramanyam; Oleograph, *c.*1930.

*Plates 120–22*

The industrial production of icons was, at the beginning, confined to deities of pan-Indian appeal. The display of gods and goddesses as prints soon became a popular fashion, at a time when a large array of local deities had still not been bestowed with an anthropomorphic form. When finally these local gods or goddesses were supplied in print, they were given a form close or similar to that of deities who were already widely accepted. The new deities received the names of specific local gods or goddesses, but their paraphernalia, vahanas, or other outward signs were often incorrectly rendered or exchanged. Indeed, the industrialization of gods brought about a considerable reduction in the morphological variation of deities, and in the number of gods and goddesses altogether.

Plate 120 Bhootnath (Lord of the Spirits); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Bhootnath, or 'Lord of the Spirits', is one of the many epithets for Shiva. The god depicted here is worshipped in south India under the appellation Ayyappa. Like Murugan, another name for Kartikeya, he too is the son of Shiva, but this time with Vishnu. His gestation and birth is as complicated as the birth of his brother Kartikeya. He is not born from the womb of a woman, since both his parents are male gods.

He was found by a king on a river bank and adopted as his heir. The queen, however, wanted Ayyappa dead so that her own son could be crowned the prince. Pretending to be ill, she sent Ayyappa into the forest to fetch her the milk of a tigress, in the hope that wild beasts would devour her foster-son. But Ayyappa came back riding the tigress, followed by her cubs.

Ayyappa is worshipped as a forest deity mainly in Kerala. However, in the last twenty years or so, it is his main sanctuary in Sabarimala that has became a popular pilgrimage spot, drawing worshippers from all over India.

Why this picture is named after Bhootnath is not clear, and nor is it clear why it shows a lion instead of a tiger. What we do know is that such iconographic travesties are typical of the introduction of minor gods into the pantheon of printed images.

Plate 121 Bahujraji; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

A goddess much revered in Gujarat and Maharashtra, Bahujraji is the guardian deity of the *Hijras*, the community of eunuchs and transvestites in northern India. Her vahana is the rooster.

Plate 122 Shani Dev; Oleograph, 1912.

Shani is the god who rules one of the nine planets in Indian cosmology. He is the Indian equivalent of Saturn, known for his uneven temper. His vahana is the crow.

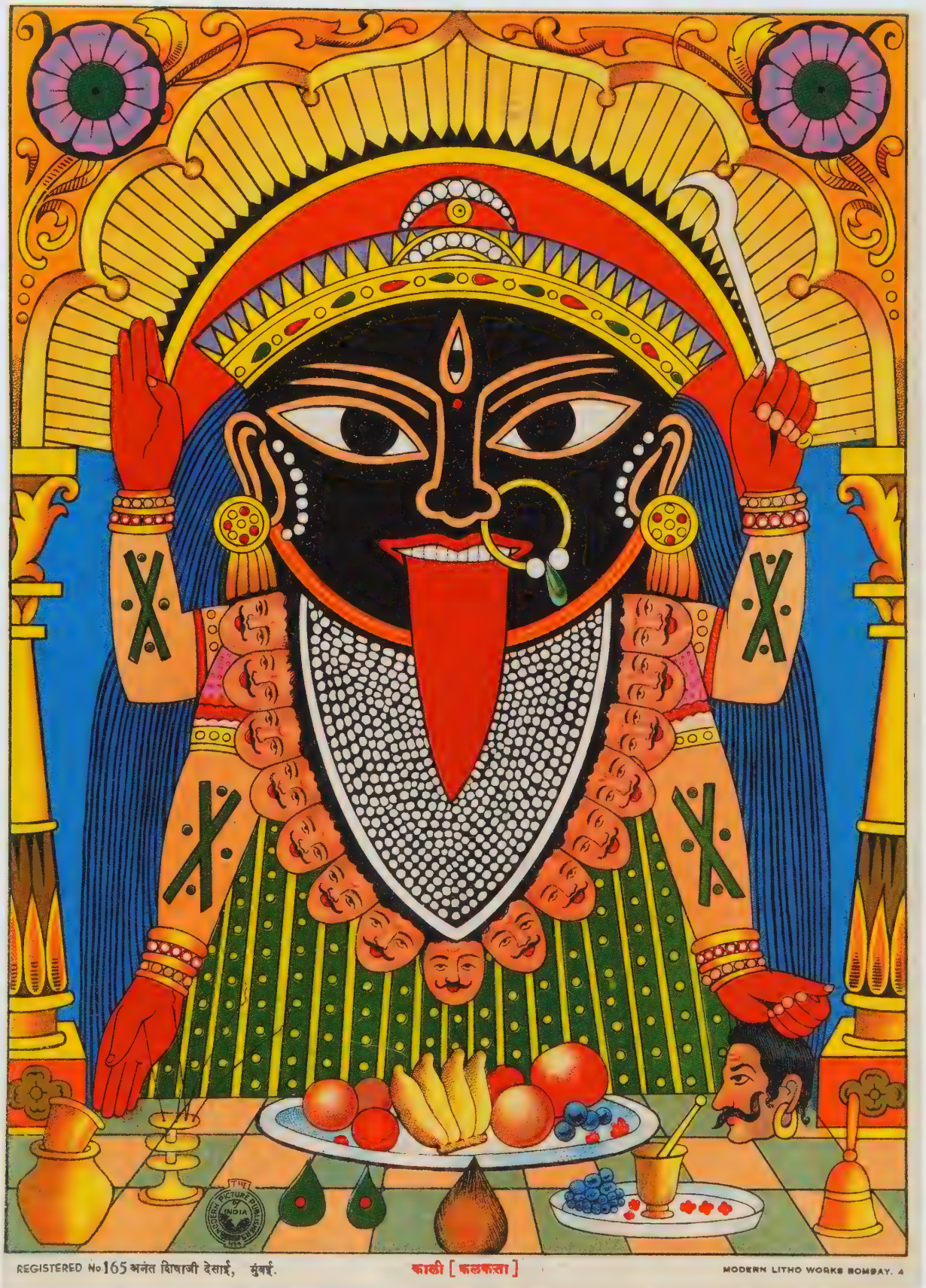


Plate 123 Kali; Oleograph, Kolkata, *c.*1940.

Plate 124 Kali; Oleograph, *c.*1900.

According to a legend, when Kali was killing the demon Raktavija, she had to drink his blood for if even a drop fell on the earth, it would spawn new demons. She was about to destroy the entire world in a frenzy when Shiva, her husband, placed himself amongst the corpses. Almost stepping over his body, she regained her poise and therein ended her madness. Her tongue, red with Raktavija's blood, is also symbolic of her embarrassment at having lost control.

*Plates 123–8*

The depiction of the more terrifying form of Goddess Parvati, as Kali, was perceived by sections of the Anglicized and urbanized middle class as an embarrassment during the nineteenth century. The frenzied goddess, with skulls slung across her naked body, devouring slain foes, disembowelling them and drinking their blood, wearing entrails around her neck, and coming to rest only over her ithyphallic husband with her legs wide open, was surely not the picture with which they wanted to represent their culture—but there it was!

Often, during culturally insecure times, people tend to revitalize rustic and obscure practices. The first prints of Kali appeared in Kolkata during 1860, as poster-advertisements for a brand of cigarettes, named 'Kali'. The commercialization of this goddess drew a mixed response.

It is possible that the colours used to depict her were perceived as expressions of a radical nationalist stance: the supine pale body of Shiva and a striding, dark-complexioned female form above him could well have been a metaphor for the uprising 'blacks' trampling a white corpse. The avenging goddess became the tutelary deity of the revolutionary brotherhoods which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, were active in the then undivided Bengal.

Much later, when Gandhi's policy of passive resistance and non-violence replaced the policy of terror, Bharat Mata still retained her attitude of a national Shakti, but was transformed from a goddess of revenge to one of suffering. Of late, it is only the picture of Hind Mata or Bharat Mata that is remodelled on Durga, or rather, on her west-Indian manifestation Bhavani, the powerful guardian deity of Hinduism. With the lion as her *vahana*, she fences in the contours of India as the protectress of a Hindu nation, as India is envisaged by its many chauvinist right-wing organizations.

*facing page*

Kali in the form she is worshipped at the great Kalighat temple of Kolkata.

Plate 125 Kaliyamma (Kali); Oleograph, *c.*1910.

This print is reminiscent of glass paintings from the latter half of the nineteenth century, in a style popular in Tanjore and other cities of south India.

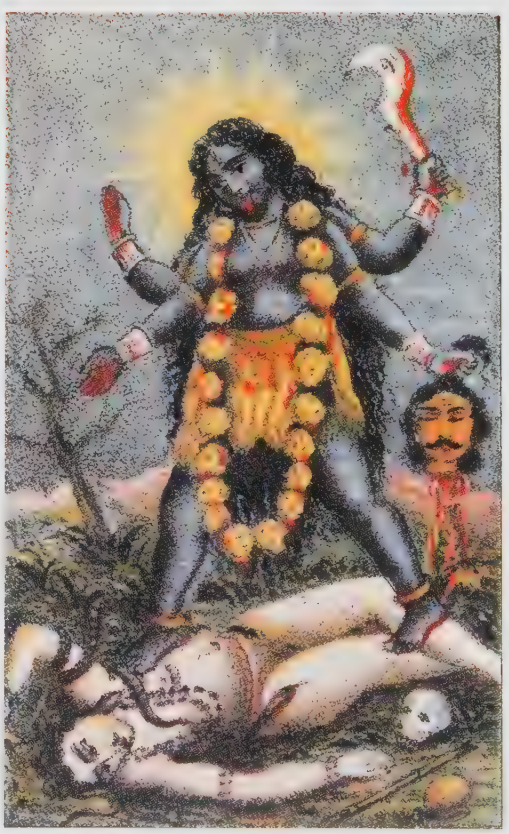

Plate 126 Kali; Colour lithograph, Kolkata, *c.*1870.

Plate 127 Durga on a Tiger; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

The iconography of Durga or Kali differs widely in different parts of India. In western India, she is often depicted astride a tiger rather than a lion.

Plate 128 Durga; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

When the buffalo-headed demon, Mahishasur, was attempting to seize celestial power, the gods created Durga and equipped her with each of their own invincible weapons. From Vishnu she got the club, from Shiva the *trishul*, and her vahana, the lion, came from Himalaya, the god of the mountains. She is the maiden goddess who finally slew the adversary.

One of the major deities in eastern India, Bengal's most important festival, Durga Puja, is dedicated to her. The festival is a celebration of her victory over the demon of darkness. Since her vahana is the lion—also a symbol of British power—Durga, in nationalistic iconography, came to symbolize the subjugation of imperialistic forces.

Plate 129 Astra Dan (Gift of Arms); Half-tone print, *c.*1940.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose receives the sword from Durga.This picture is modelled on the popular print of Shivaji before Bhavani.

Plate 130 Shivaji before Bhavani; Oleograph, *c.*1925.

Goddess Bhavani (Durga) handing the sword of victory to Shivaji, the Maratha ruler, who in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries carved out a Maratha state from the southern flanks of the Mughal empire. This state was soon to cover large parts of the Deccan.

The nineteenth-century independence movement led by Balgangadhar Tilak, in the Bombay Presidency, deified Shivaji as a national hero.

Plate 131 Bharat Mata, Offset print, 1937; Painting by P. S. Ramachandran Rao.

Bharat Mata's robe forms the contours of India. Her saffron, white, and green sari—the colours of the Indian national flag—cradles the heroes of the national struggle and shelters the fighters still alive and leading the teeming millions. Among the heroes of the bygone years, one can identify Justice Ranade, Balgangadhar Tilak, and the founder of the Indian National Congress, A.O. Hume. The leaders of the masses are Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Chandrashekhar Azad, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, Abdul Gaffar Khan, and others.

The diverse pictorial traditions of India made it difficult to find a symbol of national integrity acceptable to all. To worship a geographical map of India seemed to be a way out of the dilemma of finding a symbol for the Motherland without antagonizing the religious sentiments averse to the idea of bowing before an image of an anthropomorphic god or goddess. One of the earliest and largest temples of Bharat Mata was established in 1936 in the city of Varanasi, where a large relief map of *Akhanda Bharat* or South Asia lies enshrined. By this time, the practice of using a contour map of India to deify Bharat Mata had already gained popularity.

Plate 132 Shivaji Maharaj, Oleograph, *c.*1900; Painting by Ravi Varma.

Plate 133 Shivaji, Oleograph, Germany, 1890?; Painting entitled *Der Heer Sevagi* by an unknown Dutch artist. (Den Haag, 1664)

Shivaji leads his swift Maratha cavalry against the mighty Mughal armies.

During the time of its creation, this painting was an outspoken political statement in favour of radical Maratha nationalism. In 1897 'Lokmanya' Balgangadhar Tilak was sentenced to several months' imprisonment for seditious writing. He had published a poem in the form of an elegy for Shivaji, on the devastation of the country brought about by foreign rulers. A firebrand nationalist agitator, Tilak had also masterminded a celebration commemorating the bicentenary of Shivaji's coronation to counter the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria taking place at the same time. He also re-valorized the Ganesh festival in Mumbai and Pune. These strategic 'festivals' were in fact platforms to rally national dissent against the colonial power. The ploy had the British administration in a quandary since they could not have possibly opposed these 'celebrations' without resorting to dictatorial measures, which would have further stoked popular dissent.

Plate 134 Kalki; Colour lithograph; Kolkata, *c.*1880.

The iconography of all equestrian heroes and heroines is reminiscent of Kalki, the incarnation of Vishnu as a horseman.

Plate 135 Rani of Jhansi; Half-tone print, *c.*1985.

Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, is one of the better-known national martyrs of the Mutiny of 1857. Following her husband's death in 1853, she was to become the Regent of Jhansi, a princely state in central India. She had no children of her own but for a young boy who had been adopted by her late husband, and who she tried hard to establish as heir to the throne. She finally lost out to the British-imposed Doctrine of Lapse according to which kingdoms without 'natural' heirs fell under the domain of the East India Company.

During the mutiny of 1857, a small British population and detachment at Jhansi was taken prisoner and killed by rebelling troops who had also taken over Jhansi. Soon, British troops took Jhansi back from the mutineers and avenged the killing of their people in a mad orgy of gruesome murder. The Rani fled and was killed fighting in a battle near Gwalior. In display prints, she is invariably portrayed with her son strapped to her back—a reminder of the real cause of dissent between Jhansi and the East India Company.

While the company troops are represented in a field-green battle dress with French helmets from WW1, the mutineers denote a drama beyond the confines of history. Like epic heroes, they are shown mounted on steeds, and fighting to the very end.

Plate 136 Hind Devi (Goddess India); Oleograph. *c.*1935.

শহীদ ক্ষুদিরাম Shaheed Khudiram

Plate 137 Martyr Khudiram; Half-tone print, *c.*1947.

Khudiram, a young schoolboy, was also a member of the Alipur conspiracy, a secret brotherhood that operated around 1900 from Alipur. The secret society opted for direct action against the British. His assignment to assassinate the Presidency Magistrate to avenge the heavy sentence awarded to his revolutionary comrades turned into a catastrophe. He failed to identify his victim and threw a bomb into the coach of a certain Mrs Kennedy who, together with her daughter, died. Khudiram was caught, tried, and hanged. At the time of his sentence he was barely fifteen years of age and soon became a popular child martyr of the struggle for independence. He is still remembered in many songs and popular legends.

शहीद-स्मृति Shaheed-Smirity.

Plate 138 Martyrs of Freedom; Half-tone print, *c.*1947.

Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, offers the goddess, as an ultimate sacrifice, the heads of the heroes of the struggle for independence. The goddess in turn presents Nehru with the flag of the Indian Union. In her other hands are earlier versions of the banner of the freedom struggle, the one at the extreme right being the one that Madam Cama unfurled at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart in 1906.

*facing page*

Durga as Hind Devi or Goddess India, flanked by her vahana, the lion. In her four arms are the paraphernalia of the new order: the lotus, the Gita, the club, and above all, the banner of the Indian National Congress.

*Plates 139–149*

Mahatma Gandhi gave the struggle for independence a new moral basis founded on the principle of non-violence. Its chief weapons were strict non-cooperation and the passive resistance of the masses towards instruments of foreign rule. The visual propaganda of this ideology projected India as a suffering goddess in shackles rather than as a wrathful deity. Suffering and stoic patience was endorsed as the attitude of a higher moral order as against the cruelty and tyranny of the colonial oppressor. Although Indian visual art had traditional means to express such sentiments, the propaganda of the time relayed a rather European–Christian iconography. The popular prints of the period are modelled on the Christian iconography of a saviour god demanding patience.

Although a large number of prints before 1900 contained subtle political messages, it was only after 1920 that overtly nationalistic prints were distributed widely. Most of these prints featured Mahatma Gandhi among other select leaders of the Congress movement.

Plate 139 Bharat Mata; Half-tone print, *c.*1950.

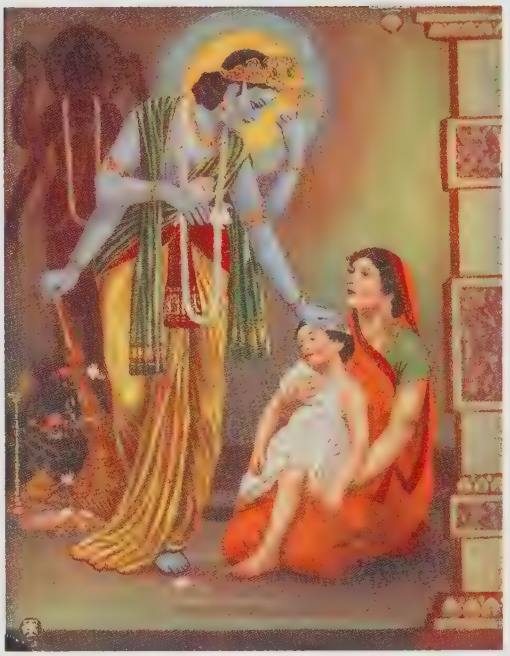

Plate 140 Vishnu the Saviour; Half-tone print, *c.*1934.

Bharat Mata with the earth as her throne, and the Mahatma seated in her lap. Vishnu can be seen showering flower petals on the Mahatma.

*facing page*

Gandhi as the slain messiah in the lap of Bharat Mata, styled as an Indian pieta.

চির নিদ্রায় বাপুজী

Bapuji on eternal sleep

Plate 141 Bapuji on Eternal Sleep; Half-tone print, 1948.

Plate 142 Mahatma Gandhi; Oleograph, *c.*1925.

One of the earliest socio-economic campaigns organized by Gandhi was the Swadeshi Movement. It started with the boycott of English textiles and the development of an indigenous cottage industry for textiles. Gandhi's concept of industrial development was based on the idea of labour-intensive small-scale industries, with the cotton industry playing a central role. This industry was to provide millions of unemployed and starving people with a source of livelihood. Hand-spinning and weaving therefore became a key symbol of the Congress, manifesting itself in the Congress banner, a tricolour of saffron, white, and green, with a spinning wheel at the centre.

Clad in homespun clothes, Gandhi once attended a round-table conference in London, where he brought along with him a milch goat to symbolize the self-sufficiency of the Indian people.

His stubborn puritanical simplicity was sometimes dismissed as a publicity gimmick. In truth, however, it was also the chosen modesty of a person practising the morals he preached, and who had set out to give a voice to the voiceless of India.

Plate 143 Mahatma Gandhi; Half-tone print, *c.*1940.

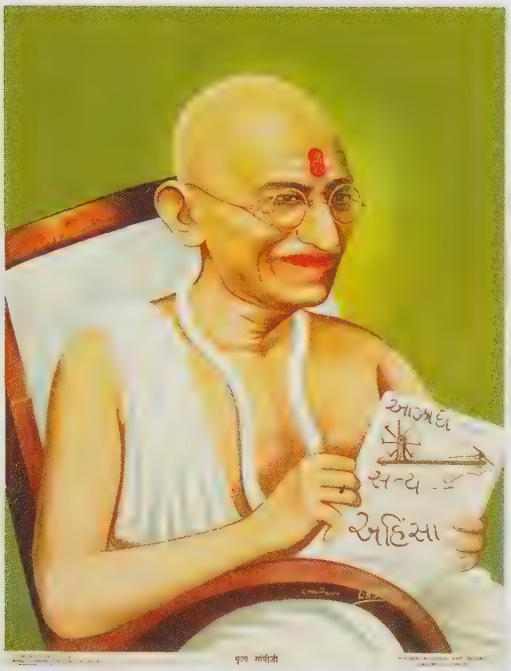


Plate 144 Gandhi; Oleograph, 1946.

Plate 145 The Life of Gandhi; Half-tone print, *c.*1950.

ppy Right S. No. 5–JOSHI ART WORKS.
Gandhi Road, Ahmedabad.

कलजुगमे ईश्वरी अवतार
गांधीजी
Stockist:–ANANT SHIVAJI DESAI, Bombay.

Krishna Calendar Co. Ahmedabad

Plate 146 Gandhi; Oleograph, 1948.

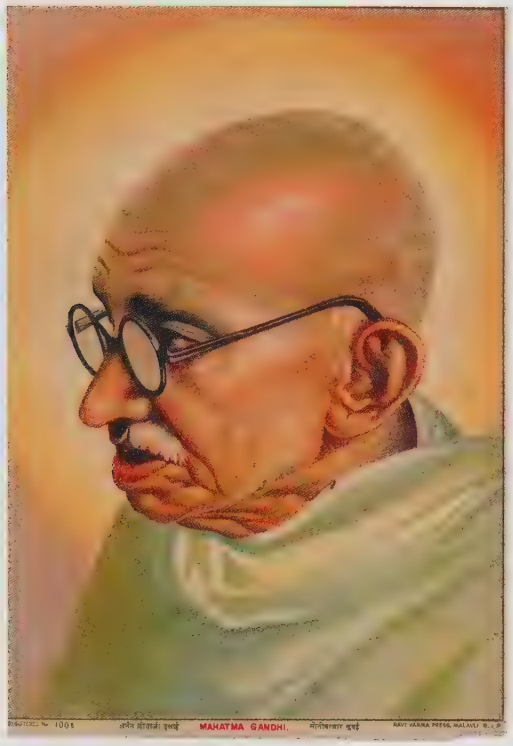


Plate 147 Mahatma Gandhi; Oleograph, *c.*1940.

Plate 148 Last Journey of Bapuji; Half-tone print, 1948.

Gandhi standing between the religious founders, Buddha and Jesus. The mythological hunter, Jara, with a smoking pistol in one hand and his bow in the other, reinforces the analogy drawn between Gandhi's violent death and the prophesied, though inadvertent, death of Krishna at the hands of Jara.

To establish a parallel between the predestined death of Krishna at the hands of a hunter, and the violent death of the Mahatma at the hands of a Hindu chauvinist, Nathuram Godse, and to describe it as the work of destiny appears to be a perfidious view of history—especially since Gandhi's assassination took place at a point in time when his moral stance had already begun to obstruct the ways of Realpolitik.

No. 849. बापू के अन्तिम दर्शन

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Plate 149 Bapuji's *Cremation*; Half-tone print, *c.*1948.

Plate 150 Jawaharlal Nehru; Colour lithograph, *c.*1950.

Nehru in front of the Red Fort in Delhi.

*facing page*

The assembly on the cremation ground in New Delhi shows Lord and Lady Mountbatten, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, and Sardar Patel among other political figures, while the Mahatma blesses them from above.

Plate 151 Gandhi and Nehru; Colour lithograph, *c.*1950.

Gandhi, father of the Indian nation, looks benevolently towards his comrade Jawaharlal Nehru.

Plate 152 The Leaders of the Nation; Half-tone print, *c.*1950.

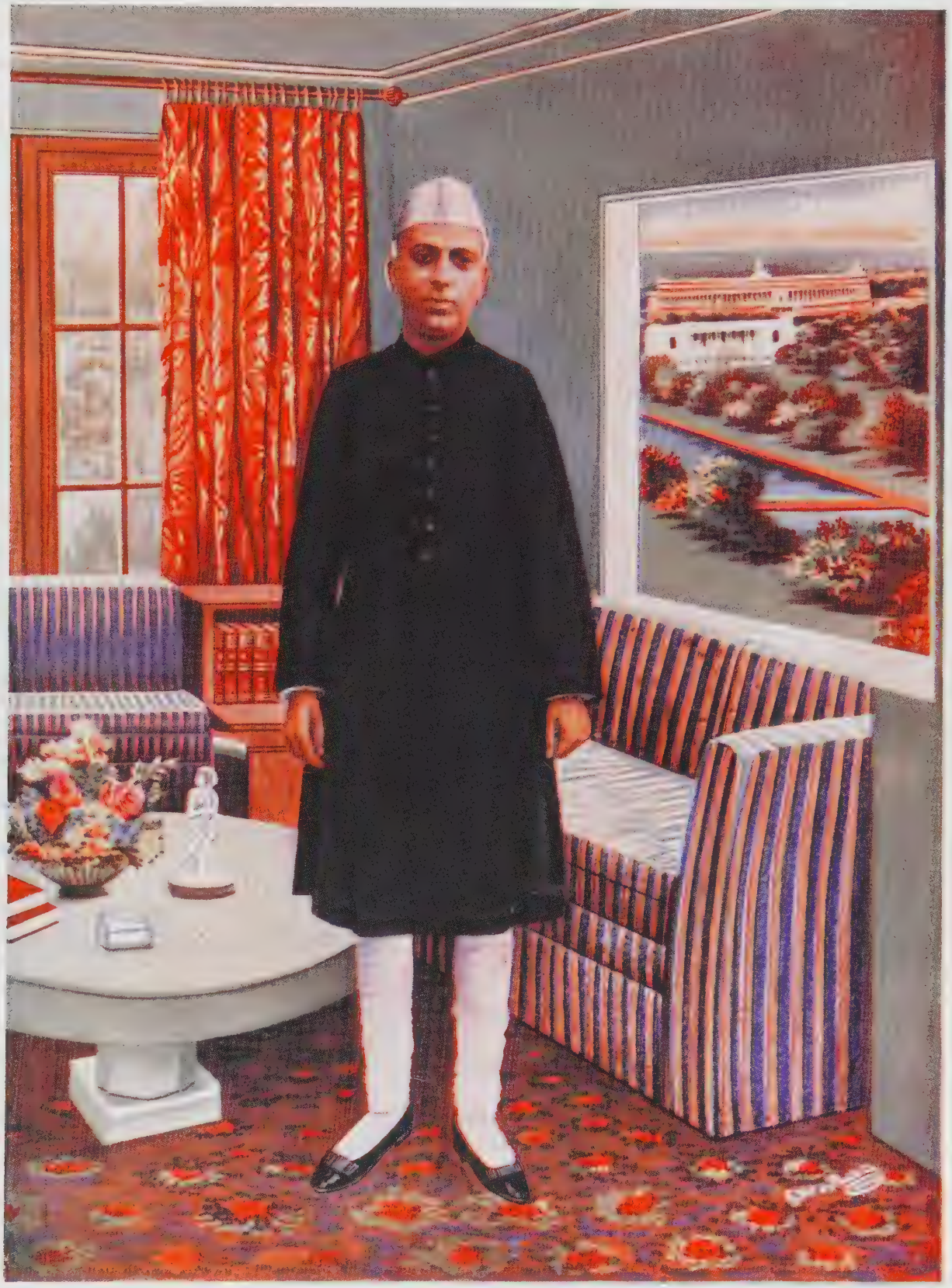
(Top left to right) Mahatma Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad (the first President of independent India), Sardar Patel (the first Home Minister), and Subhash Chandra Bose.

(Bottom left to right) 'Lokmanya' Tilak, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai, and Rabindranath Tagore.

The proliferation of nationalistic prints began only after India became a free country. These prints were selective in their visual representation of history and were able to accomplish more significantly, by appealing to popular taste, what state propaganda could not achieve otherwise.

Plate 153 Chacha Nehru; Half-tone print, *c.*1960.

Nehru's love for children earned him the epithet, *chacha* or uncle. His birthday is celebrated as Children's Day in India.



No. 844. पं जवाहरलाल

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Plate 154 Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru; Half-tone print, *c.*1950.

Plate 155 Indira Gandhi and Sanjay; Offset print, *c.*1976.

*facing page*

Nehru in a rather dollhouse-like ambience. The table holds, besides a flower arrangement, a statue of Bharat Mata. Through the window can be seen the circular building of the Parliament House in New Delhi.

Although India never experienced a centralized personality cult after Independence, it is true that during the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi between 1975 and 1977, her dictatorial reign was accompanied by a totalitarian visual propaganda, which centred on her and her son, Sanjay. In response to the Congress' former election symbol of a cow with her suckling calf (abandoned following the ruling of the High Court which declared it to be a sacral symbol), mother and son were often mocked at as the cow and calf of Indian politics. The period of Emergency, however, was too short to really succeed in such a personality cult. Its otherwise imminent end was sealed by the first electoral defeat of Indira Gandhi and the Congress party, followed shortly by the death of Sanjay Gandhi in a plane crash.

India still continues to demonstrate the tendency to project political functionaries as leaders of a superhuman status during political campaigns and election rallies, staging them in the style of calendar-picture heroes. The aesthetic of such campaigns derives from south Indian cinema advertisements that have now also gained popularity in the north.

*Plates 156–9*

Besides Gandhi and Nehru, 'Netaji' Subhash Chandra Bose was the next most-represented national leader in popular prints. However, prints featuring Bose often conformed to a fascist iconography otherwise unusual in popular Indian art.

Bose's life history had all the revolutionary and adventurous drive of a popular hero. He was a player in world politics, shaking hands with Hitler, and being transferred in a submarine from Europe to South-east Asia during World War II; he led a military campaign against the British imperialists and finally vanished forever in a mysterious plane accident, after which he rose as a mythological figure, recalled each time political opportunism or popular dissent needed a 'Führer'. In Bengal, Bose's iconographic incarnation took the form of Kalki, the horseman who cleanses the corrupt world with his scimitar to pave the way for a new 'Golden Age'.

Plate 156 Netaji (Royal Dress); Half-tone print, *c.*1945.

Plate 157 Netaji and Hitler (detail from a life history of Netaji); Half-tone print, 1947.

Bose met Hitler in 1942 in Berlin. Their costumes, however, were far less spectacular than shown in this print.

ARE YOU AN INDIAN ?
THEN STAND BEFORE THIS MONUMENT A MINUTE !
HERE WAS PLANTED ON BRITISH INDIAN SOIL THE FIRST FLAG OF INDEPENDENT INDIA
18 MARCH 1944
KOHIMA !

Plate 158 Kohima; Half-tone print, *c.*1945.

The battle for Kohima in Nagaland was a decisive engagement during World War II, in which the Indian National Army (INA) took part. The Japanese forces, of which the INA was part, were repelled causing the rollback of Japanese power in South-east Asia to begin.

Plate 159 Bharat Mata and Netaji; Half-tone print, *c.*1945.

Plate 160 Khalimé-e Sharif (The Word of the Chosen One); Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Plate 161 Dua Lady (Lady in Prayer); Offset print, *c.*1990.

*Plates 160–9*

India's long tradition of Islamic art has always flourished in an intensive dialogue with the visual arts of Hindu India. Since Islam has strictures against anthropomorphic depiction, God, the Prophet, and other heroes of the faith are represented only metaphorically. Although the strictures against depicting human forms are binding for all forms of Islamic art, it was never strictly enforced in profane themes. Indeed, the famous Mughal courts of northern India employed craftsmen irrespective of their religious faith, who produced paintings quite unrestricted by ideological strictures.

Nonetheless, a fallout of the restriction on anthropomorphic depiction in Islamic art was that it fostered a refined sensibility among the Moslems for the decorative, and here before all, for the art of calligraphy.

Islamic prints replaced hand-painted greeting formulae, or calligraphic renderings from scriptures. While crucial episodes from the Koran were reproduced metaphorically, other themes of not less theological importance were illuminated quite freely, circumventing iconic strictures. The prints that pictured paradise, with its lakes, trees, and birds, dwelt quite irreligiously long on the beauty of the *houris*, the virgin slaves of paradise. A typical genre of Islamic prints comprises pictures of the holy places of Mecca and Medina among others. These pictures show sacred architecture bared of all human life. Another popular type shows children or young ladies devotedly reading the Koran—a sacral front indeed for painting pretty faces.

*facing page*

A woman saying her prayer on Id.
This print is a subtle masterpiece. The woman is wearing a *burkha* (veil), but her face is uncovered. The theme of the picture is sacral, but the focus of the print is undoubtedly the pretty face.

Plate 162 The Moon of Id; Half-tone print, *c.*1950.

Plate 163 Burk-e Albani (Buraq-al Nabi or Buraq of the Prophet); Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Al-Buraq, a mythical being who is supposed to have served many prophets and is bestowed with the most fantastic of attributes: a human face, a horse's mane, a camel's legs and hoofs, a cow's body, ruby-red breasts, and the wings of an angel.

One of the episodes in the life of Mohammed (Isra, Sure xvii) speaks of a journey where one night he was carried by Buraq from Mecca to Jerusalem. From Jerusalem he went to heaven, where he was ushered into the light of Allah, before returning to Mecca again. Buraq's speed is described as being so great that a single stride takes her beyond the horizon.

Plate 164 Quran Baby; Offset print, *c.*1990.

Boy reading from the Koran.

Plate 165 Duldul; Oleograph, ca. 1920.

Busaina Tuljan, Hussain's horse after the battle of Karbala. This battle forms the historic centre of the first schism of Islam, still manifest in the rift between the Shiaites and the Sunnis. When, during the battle between the Hashemit and Umayyad tribes, Hussain met his end and fell, his horse fled back to the camp, pursued by enemy arrows. Since this myth forms the religious centre of the Shiaite creed, the command against depictions of human figures is strictly adhered to. Popular Islamic visual art has developed a large vocabulary of symbols and codes to counter restrictions on anthropomorphic representation. Portraits of saints and holy persons are replaced by roses which carry their names, narrative sequences from the scriptures are metaphorically denoted by artefacts which play a significant narrative role—for instance, two crossed swords symbolize a duel, an arrow through a leather water-bag recalls the episode of children dying of thirst, a caravan of riderless camels is reminiscent of the battle of Karbala, etc.

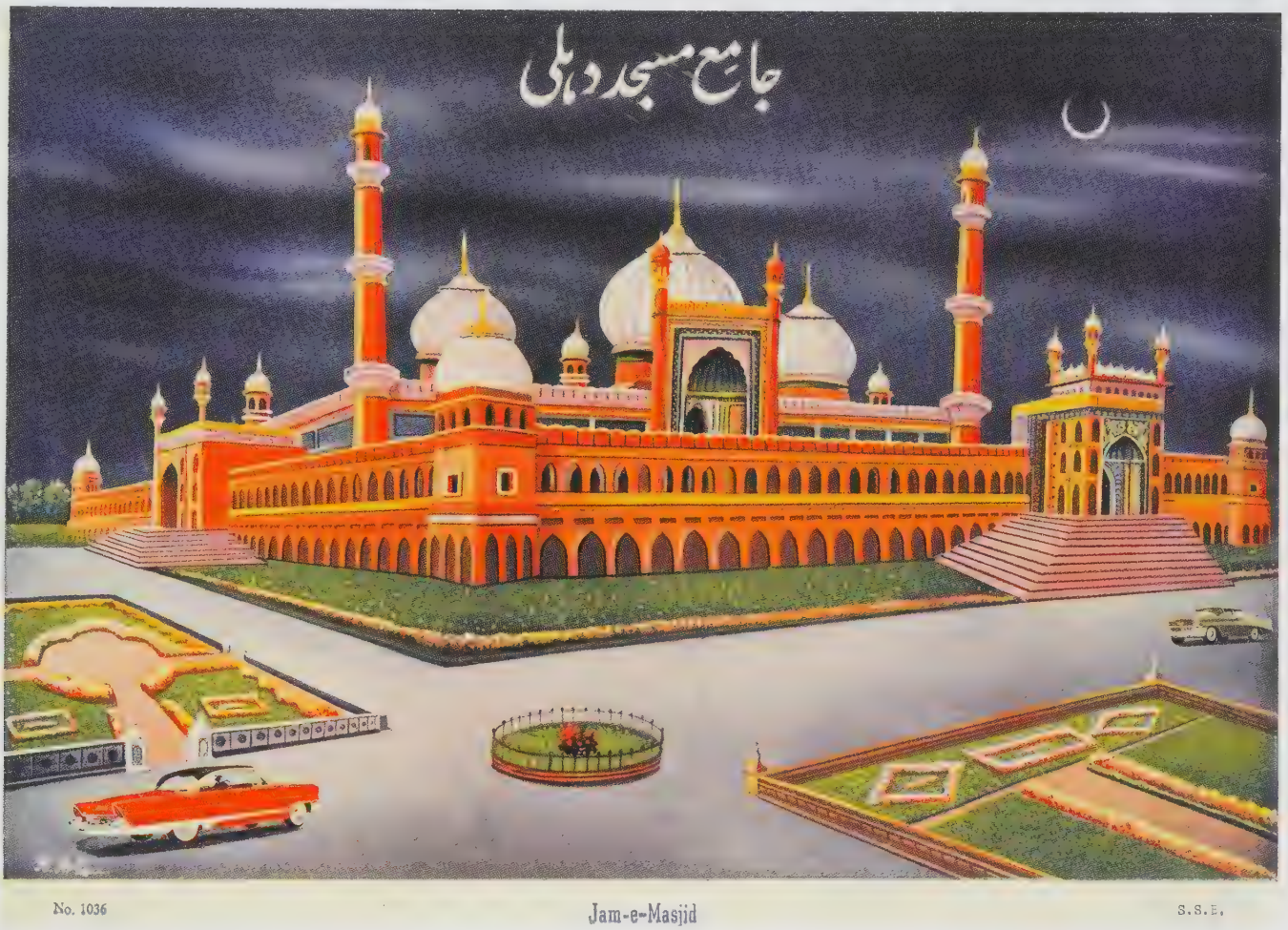
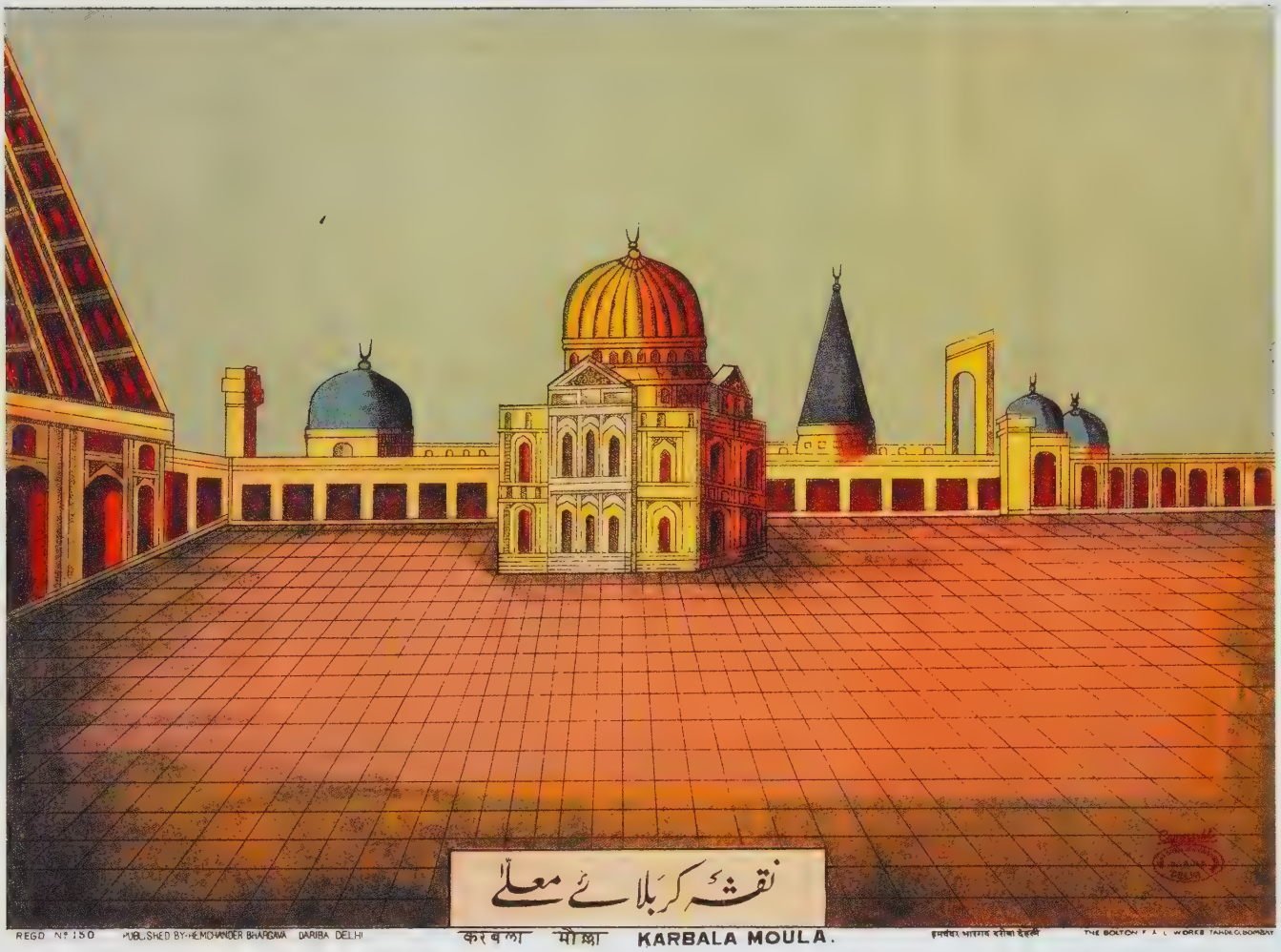



Plate 166 Jam-e-Masjid; Half-tone print, *c.*1960.

The Jam-e-Masjid (now called Jama Masjid) in Delhi is one the largest mosques built by the Mughals in India. This picture is enlivened by two Chevrolets.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करबला मौला KARBALA MOULA.
THE BOLTON P. L. WORKS TARDEO BOMBAY

Plate 167 Karbala Moula; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Husain's tomb in Karbala is one of the most significant pilgrimage sites of the Shias.

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Plate 168 Odalisque; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

The standard iconography of a stereotypical Islamic picture would include water, verdant vegetation, the rose, a peacock, and idyllic gardens—the promised paradise for the true believer.

The print here has all the ingredients of the promised paradise, in rudimentary but nonetheless obvious symbols. A houri, the eternal virgin slave promised to a true believer, is placed in the centre of this print while all the other assets are removed to the periphery. The water is reduced to a spouting fountain, the peacock to a hand-held fan, the vegetation becomes a lover's grove where a flask of wine and a plucked rose indicate the pleasures to be.

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Plate 169 Oomer Khayyam; Offset print, *c.*1980.

The ghazals and poems of classical Persian and Urdu poets are widely known in India. The secular poetry of Omar Khayyam, with its erotic and intoxicating imagery, lends itself to visualization in romantic prints.

*Plates 170–73*

Sikhism, as a religion, emerged in the cultural set-up of the Punjab during the fifteenth century. After Tamerlane overran northern India and sacked Delhi to return to his own capital, Samarkand, north India became a region of strife and endemic warfare between the fluctuating clans of Afghan nobles. It was after 1450 that a structure of power and administration gradually reappeared under the Lodis, and people had to come to terms with their rigid Brahminical caste structure, their overbearing new aristocracy of Muslims, and a large proselytized neo-Muslim populace, besides the teeming masses that comprised low-caste artisans and slaves. A number of religious movements and sects were trying to bridge the sharp divide between people of different castes and beliefs, trying to come to terms with the political and social situation in north India.

Sikhism drew heavily from aspects of the Sufi tradition that dealt with the sanctification of teachers and holy men, as well as the Bhakti cults present in northern India at the time. It rejected the idea of caste and priestly sacrificial practices, and propagated the equality of all men before God who they believe is the same for all, and who can be approached directly by anyone, with little need for a mediating agent. For this reason, Sikh teachings used the language of the land. As the Sikh community grew, it also began wielding considerable local power in Punjab, bringing the state in direct confrontation with Mughal interests, particularly in the seventeenth century when the Sikhs dabbled in courtly power politics.

Popular Sikh mythology presents itself as the hagiography of religious teachers and martyrs, a tradition that is evident in popular Sikh iconography. Most of the pictures show portraits of the teachers of the faith—in particular, of Nanak Dev, the first guru, and the tenth and last guru, Gobind Singh. Nonetheless, there is also a growing body of prints that valorizes the deeds of Sikh heroes and kings. These pictures are rather overbearing in their depiction of the tortures inflicted by the adversaries, the Mughals, on Sikh fighters or gurus for holding on to their beliefs. It was the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, who is most remembered for the cruelties he inflicted on the Sikhs. In these prints, Sikh victims are depicted with stoic expressions, facing the most inhuman of tortures like being boiled in cauldrons or sawed into two, or being walled in by the henchmen of the Mughals.

Plate 170 Guru Nanak Dev; Oleograph, *c.*1920.

Guru Nanak with his two disciples and travelling companions, Mardana and Bala.

*facing page*

This print portrays the ten teachers or Gurus of the Sikh religion. The two larger vignettes are reserved for the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak (1469–1539), and Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the last of the Gurus who organized the Sikhs under a uniform law.

The other Gurus are (from top to bottom):
(Left) Guru Angad (1504–22), Guru Amar Das (1479–1574), Guru Ram Das (1534–81), Guru Arjan (1563–1606).

(Right) Guru Hargobind (1594–1644), Guru Har Rai (1630–61), Guru Har Krishan (1656–64), Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621–75).

Plate 171 The Ten Gurus of the Sikhs; Oleograph, *c.*1925.

Plate 172 Martyrdom of the Two Sons of Guru Gobind Singh; Half-tone print, *c.*1950.

The Mughal governor Vazir Khan took hostage Guru Gobind's two younger sons, Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh, after a battle in 1704 and walled them up alive in the city-wall of Sirhind after they refused to convert to Islam. The two martyrs of the faith are guided by Guru Gobind Singh, their father, and by Guru Tegh Bahadur, who was their grandfather and a martyr himself.

Plate 173 Guru Gobind Singh; Oleograph, *c.*1910.

Guru Gobind Singh was the founder of the Sikh military order, the Khalsa. The Khalsa was created to protect the Sikh faith. As a sign of their commitment to the religion, the Sikhs have to identify themselves with five attributes: an iron bangle, unclipped hair and beard, a comb, a sword or dagger, and knee-long drawers. The Sikhs were, from then on, given either the title 'Singh' (for men) or 'Kaur' (for women). Gobind Singh's royal attire indicates that he is also considered as the warrior king, who fought innumerable battles against the Mughal power during the reign of Aurangzeb.

# GLOSSARY

The range of Indian mythology is vast, and the scope of this book permits no more than a bird's-eye view of it. This glossary should enable readers not overly familiar with the multitude of names to fall back upon the bare skeleton of mythological relations provided. The glossary also explains some Indian terms used in the preceding pages.

**Annapurna** — Another name for Parvati, the goddess of food. (*See* Plate 109)

**amrit** — The elixir of immortality, extracted during the churning of the ocean by the asuras and the gods. The amrit was withheld from the asuras by the gods, who fled, hiding the vessel at four places: Haridwar, Naini, Ujjain, and Nashik. The Kumbh Mela is celebrated every three years, by rotation, at each of these places. (*See* Plate 69)

**asuras** — Demons. The Titans of Indian mythology, who were doomed to eternally challenge the power of the gods when they were deprived of their share of the amrit.

**apsara** — Female celestial being of extraordinary beauty. Apsaras appear in mythological literature as consorts to gods and sages as well as temptresses to human beings.

**avatar** — Incarnation of a god, especially of Vishnu. (*See* Plates 64–73)

**Balakrishna** — Child Krishna. (*See* Plates 79–81)

**Balaram** — Krishna's half-brother. One of the incarnations of Vishnu, his insignia is the plough. He is also called Halali, or the Ploughnan. (*See* Plates 72, 89)

**Balasubramanyam** — Child Subramanyam. (*See* Plates 117–19)

**Bapuji** — Father. Synonym for Mahatma Gandhi, also known as the Father of the Nation. (*See* Plates 139–49)

**Bharat** — India. Name of an ancient dynasty that ruled the country. (*See* Plates 51–2)

| | |
|---|---|
| Battala | A locality in north-west Kolkata, famous—or infamous—for printing religious books, almanacs, and erotic obscenities. |
| Bhagirath | The name of the sage who brought down Ganga from the heavens. (*See* Plates 114–16) |
| Bharat Mata | Mother India. (*See* Plates 36–8, 129–31, 136, 138–9, 141) |
| Bhavani | Parvati / Durga / Kali. Wife of Shiva. (*See* Plates 37, 108–13) |
| Bheema | One of the five Pandava brothers who figure in the Mahabharata. |
| Bibi | A lady, wife, or consort. Also a lady of ill repute. |
| Buddha | Founder of Buddhism (5 BC). He figures in Vaishnava beliefs as the ninth avatar of Vishnu. (*See* Plates 64–73) |
| Chinnamasta | The decapitated one. One of the many forms of Durga. (*See* Plate 16) |
| chromolithography | Lithography. (*See* Plate 4) |
| caste | A rigid structure of social hierarchy in India, which governs all aspects of social interaction and professional occupation. It is a deeply entrenched and strictly demarcated four-tiered system based on birth. The Brahmins comprise the priestly class and are the most privileged, followed by the Kshatriyas, who comprise rulers and warriors; the Vaishyas, comprising traders and agriculturists, form an inner core, while on the outside, and the lowest in hierarchy are the Shudras. Each of the four castes is again divided into innumerable subcastes. |
| Churidar | Tight fitting leg-wear—part of the north Indian dress. |
| Damayanti | Heroine of the play *Nala and Damyanti*. Beloved of Nala. (*See* Plate 22) |
| diwan | Prime Minister. |
| Dushayanta | Shakuntala's lover and the father of her son, Bharata. (*See* Plates 51–2) |
| Devlok | Dwelling place of the gods. The heavens. |
| Draupadi | Wife of the five Pandava brothers. She was put at stake by her husbands in a gambling contest against their cousins, the Kauravas. |
| Durga | One of the incarnations of Parvati. She vanquished the demon Mahishasur, who entered the body of a bull to take refuge. Her vahana is the lion. (*See* Plates 125–8) |
| Elokeshi affair | The Tarakeshwar murder case (Kolkata, 1873). Elokeshi, the wife of a Brahmin clerk at the Government Printing Press in Kolkata, eloped with the chief priest of the temple at Tarakeshwar. When her husband learnt of his wife's infidelity he murdered her. (*See* Plates 9–12) |
| Ganesh | The god with an elephant's head, also known as Ganapati. The son of Shiva and Parvati, he is considered to be the remover of all obstacles. |

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| | Worshippers therefore begin all prayers or new projects with an invocation to him. Ganesh Chaturthi is the festival celebrated in his honour and with much enthusiasm by the Maharashtrians of western India. (*See* Plates 61–3, 111–13) |
| Ganga | The river Ganges personified as a goddess. Her vahana is the crocodile. (*See* Plates 114–16) |
| Gangavataran | The descent of Ganga from heaven into Shiva's locks. Ganga, it is believed, dwells in the knot on Shiva's head while her waters trickle down the strands of his hair to form the various rivers of India. (*See* Plates 114–16) |
| Garuda | The king of eagles, and Lord Vishnu's vahana. (*See* Plates 66–7) |
| gopi[s] | Milkmaids. Playmates of Lord Krishna during his days as a young cowherd. (*See* Plates 53–4, 75–9) |
| Hanuman | Faithful monkey-friend and helper of Lord Rama. (*See* Plates 99–102) |
| Hind Devi | Bharat Mata or Mother India. (*See* Plates 36–8, 129–31, 136, 138–9, 141) |
| Indra | Chief of the gods. The god of thunder, lightning and rain. |
| Jagannath | Tutelary deity of the great sanctuary at Puri, Orissa. |
| Janaki | Sita. Rama's wife and the daughter of King Janaka. |
| Jatayu | Garuda's uncle. The king of vultures. (*See* Plate 97) |
| Kailash | Mount Meru. The mythical dwelling place of the gods. (*See* Plates 111–12) |
| Kailash Nath | Shiva, Lord of Kailash. |
| Kali | The horrifying and awe-inspiring form of goddess Parvati, symbolizing destructive energy. (*See* Plates 41–3, 123–8) |
| Kalki | The tenth avatar of Vishnu. He appears in the form of a horseman with drawn sword, mounted on a white mare. (*See* Plate 134) |
| Kaliyamardan | One of the miracles of Lord Krishna where he, as a child, subjugated the king of snakes, Kaliya, who had poisoned the waters of the Yamuna with his breath. (*See* Plate 80) |
| Kartikeya | Subramanyam or Skanda. Son of Shiva and Parvati. (*See* Plates 111, 117–19) |
| Kaur | Honorific for a woman follower of Sikhism. (*See* Plate 173) |
| Kauravas | One of the two warring factions of the Bharat clan in the epic Mahabharata. The cousins and enemies of the Pandavas. (*See* Plate 90) |
| Khadi | Homespun fabric. (*See* Plate 142) |
| Khalsa | The Sikh order of the defenders of the faith of Sikhism, instituted by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. (*See* Plate 173) |

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| Krishna avatar | The incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the human form of Krishna. Although an incarnation, Krishna is granted the status of an independent god capable of manifesting himself in further innumerable incarnations. (*See* Plates 73–90) |
| Krishnalila | Krishna's playful pranks and flirtation with the gopis of Brindavan; often a favourite subject of folk art, music, theatre, and drama. |
| Kshatriya | The second rung in the hierarchy of the Hindu caste system, comprising warriors and rulers. |
| Khudiram | Child-martyr of the early twentieth-century freedom struggle. (*See* Plate 137) |
| Kurma (avatar) | Second incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the form of a tortoise. He served as a pivot for Mount Meru, which formed the churning rod, while the snake Sheshnag formed the rope which was wound around Meru for churning out the amrit from the ocean. (*See* Plate 69) |
| Lakshmi (Mahalakshmi) | Goddess of plenty and consort of Vishnu. One of the earliest goddesses depicted in iconic form. (*See* Plates 6, 33–4, 55–6) |
| Lakshman | Rama's younger brother and companion in exile. (*See* Plates 94, 96, 104) |
| lithography | A planographic printing technique invented in 1797–8 by Aloys Senefelder of Prague. The technique is based on the incompatibility of water and oil. (*See* Plate 4) |
| Mahalakshmi | Lakshmi (Maha = great). |
| mahant | Hindu priest. |
| Mahishasurmardini | Literally, the slayer of the demon, Mahishasur. Refers to Parvati / Durga, the supreme goddess of the Bengalis. (*See* Plate 128) |
| Matsya avatar | First incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the form of a fish. As Matsya, Vishnu saves mankind from the great deluge. (*See* Plate 69) |
| Menaka | A celestial nymph who seduced the sage, Vishvamitra; mother of Shakuntala. |
| Mohini | Nymph of great beauty sent by the gods to distract Lord Shiva from divine contemplation. Synonym for temptress. |
| Meru | Kailash. The mythical mountain which formed the churning rod used by the gods and asuras to extract amrit from the ocean. |
| Govardhan | The mountain which was uprooted and held up like an umbrella over his people by Lord Krishna to save them from a deluge sent by Indra. |
| mundu | A single sheet of cloth, worn by men and women in south India. |
| Nair | A matrilineal community in Kerala. The Nairs are traditional landholders and warriors. |

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| Nala | Lover of Damayanti. |
| Nanda | Krishna's foster father. |
| Nandi | The bull used by Lord Shiva as his vahana. |
| Narasimha avatar | Fourth incarnation of Vishnu as half-man–half-lion. (*See* Plates 13–14, 70–1) |
| Navagraha | The nine planets (Indian cosmology includes the moon and sun with the planets). |
| Netaji | Leader. Synonym for Subhash Chandra Bose. (*See* Plates 38, 152, 156–9) |
| Oleography | Lithography. |
| paan | Betel leaf; often used to enclose slices of betel nut mixed with lime and other ingredients to form a masticatory popular in India. |
| Pandavas | One of the two warring factions in the house of Bharat. The five Pandava brothers lost their kingdom in a gambling contest to their relatives, the Kauravas, and had to suffer exile and humiliation until they were able to recover their inheritance following the great war on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. |
| Parashuram avatar | Incarnation of Vishnu as a Brahminical axe-wielding warrior who defeats the Kshatriyas several times in order to uphold the supremacy of the Brahmins. (*See* Plate 15) |
| Parvati | One of the many names of the consort of Shiva. Also referred to as Shakti, the power, who manifests herself in many different forms. (*See* Plates 16–17, 39, 42, 105, 108–13, 116) |
| Prithviraj | Rajput king of the twelfth century from the powerful Chauhan dynasty. He sought to form an alliance against the invading Afghan armies, and died a heroic death in one of the battles that ensued. He earned himself a place in the orally transmitted folk literature of Rajasthan as a legendary hero. |
| putti | Angel. |
| Radha-Krishna | Krishna and Radha as symbolic of spiritual passion. (*See* Plates 82, 85–7) |
| Rama | The human incarnation of Vishnu. He fought a victorious battle with Ravana, the King of Lanka. Rama is the deified hero of the epic Ramayana. (*See* Plates 17, 91–104) |
| Ravana | The powerful King of the demons and the King of Lanka. The antagonism between Rama and Ravana is one of the main themes in the Ramayana. (*See* Plates 17, 94, 97–9, 112) |
| Rukmini | Krishna's consort. (*See* Plate 63) |
| sarabat | A north Indian string instrument. |
| Sarasvati | Goddess of music, learning, and wisdom. (*See* Plates 1, 2, 45–6, 56) |

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| shakti | In the Tantric system of religious practice, all gods have female counterparts, the shaktis. These goddesses are believed to represent the energy of the male deity. The Shaivite sect developed a system of independent shaktis, who are generally understood to be incarnations of Parvati, the consort of Shiva. The more famous shaktis are Durga and Kali, who again have a large number of different forms and manifestations. (*See* Plates 16, 18, 37–9, 105–16) |
| Shakuntala | Daughter of sage Vishvamitra and the nymph Menaka. Although the legend of Shakuntala is Vedic, the most celebrated rendering of this story is by Kalidas, the sixth-century poet who lived in the ancient city of Ujjain. (*See* Plates 24–5, 27, 51–2) |
| Shani Dev | Saturn, the god of quick temper. The crow is his vahana.(*See* Plate 122) |
| Shivaji | Founder of the Maratha state in the Deccan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (*See* Plates 37, 130, 132–3) |
| Shankar | Shiva. |
| Sheshnag | The seven-hooded snake upon which Vishnu reclines when it is time for rest, and he is not performing the role of the Preserver. The snake also symbolizes the universe (*See* Plates 64, 67). |
| Sheshnarayan | Vishnu. (*See* Plates 64, 67) |
| Shaivite[s] | A sect whose religious practices are centred around Shiva and his shaktis, the female deities, personified by Parvati and her many incarnations. |
| Shiva | The Destroyer. One of the three supreme deities in the Hindu pantheon, the others being, Brahma, the Creator, and Vishnu, the Preserver. The tutelary deity of the Shaivite sect of Hindusim, his vahana is Nandi, the bull. (*See* Plates 41–3, 105–16) |
| Simha | The lion used by Durga as her vahana. |
| Singh | Honorific for a male follower of Sikhism.(*See* Plates 170–3) |
| Sita | Janaki. Wife of Rama. (*See* Plates 93–8, 104) |
| Subramanyam | Kartikeya. |
| Surpanakha | A demoness, and the sister of Ravana. She met Rama during his exile in the forest and fell in love with him. After several unsuccessful attempts at trying to seduce him, she tried to gobble up Sita, who she believed was the real obstacle. Lakshman disfigured her by cutting off her nose, creating an abiding enmity between Rama and Ravana. (*See* Plate 96) |
| Surya | Sun god. He drives his golden chariot, drawn by seven mares, across the firmament everyday. |
| swayamvara | A contest staged to choose a suitable husband for a princess. (*See* Plate 94) |

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| thampuran | Male member of the aristocracy in Travancore and Cochin. |
| Tilak | 'Lokmanya' Balgangadhar Tilak (1856–1920). Leader of the Maratha nationalist movement during the second half of the nineteenth and the early-twentieth century. (*See* Plate 152) |
| Tipu Sultan | King of Mysore (1750–99). He was the most powerful antagonist of the British East India Company in the Deccan, and died fighting them to defend his capital Srirangapatnam near Mysore during the fourth Mysore war. |
| vahana | Vehicle or mount of a god or goddess, usually an animal. |
| Vaishnava[s] | A sect of Hinduism whose beliefs are centred around the tutelary deity, Vishnu, and his incarnations. As Hinduism is not a uniform, codified system, the Vaishnava and Shaivite sects do not exist in diametrical opposition to each other, but differ principally in their ritualistic practices and the deities they worship. |
| Vishvamitra | Father of Shakuntala. |
| Vishnu | Tutelary deity of the Vaishnavas. His vahana is Garuda, the sun eagle. In the trinity of the great gods, he is thought to be the Preserver of the universe. (*See* Plates 64–73) |
| Vamana avatar | The fifth incarnation of Vishnu where he takes the form of a dwarfed brahman and subjugates the powerful and proud king Bali. (*See* Plate 73) |
| Varaha avatar | The third incarnation of Vishnu in the form of a boar who lifts the earth from the bottom of the ocean. |
| vastraharan | Stealing of garments. One of Krishna's many pranks played on the gopis. (*See* Plates 53–4) |
| Vasudeva | Krishna's father. (*See* Plate 70) |
| Venugopal | Krishna. |
| Yashoda | Krishna's foster mother. (*See* Plate 69) |
| yuga | Aeon. |

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# Plates

We are grateful to the following people and institutions for allowing us to reproduce some of the plates in their possession: The Estate of Ravi Varma (Kilimanoor) for Plates 29a, 29b, 29c, 30, 32; Gayathri Varma and Satheesan Thampuran (Ernakulam,) for Plate 39; Spielkartenmuseum Leinfelden (Germany) for Plates 15, 16, 42, 71, 72; Museum für Völkerkunde (Wien) for Plates 6–13; Dr Peter Sahu (Malavli) for Plates 31, 33; Saraswati and R. Partasarathi Varma (Mavelikara) for Plates 55, 69; Kovdiah Palace (Thiruvananthapuram) for Plate 62; State Archives (Thiruvananthapuram) for Plates 28a, 28b. (All other visual material is from the collection of the authors.)

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Plate 2
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Ganapati
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Half-tone print, *c.*1950
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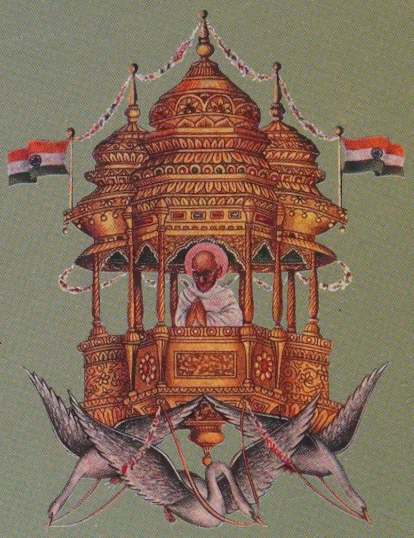
PLATE 173
Guru Gobind Singh
Oleograph, *c.*1910

*Cont'd from front flap*

entrenched in the nation's subconscious. Today, 'calendar art', 'filmi' advertisements, and political propaganda, bedeck the urban Indian landscape — all a result of the industrialization of the Indian image.

Sociologists and art historians have only recently begun to take a new look at the origins of this popular medium, against the backdrop of the use of this art by political parties for canvassing votes, as well as the film industry.



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*Jacket illustrations: (Front) Damayanti (Oleograph, 1894); painting by Raja Ravi Varma.*
*(Back) Shakuntala writing a love letter on a lotus leaf (Oleograph, c. 1900); Ravi Varma Press.*

This book is the fascinating story of how modern printing techniques transformed the face of art and imagery in India, catapulting mythical and popular images within the reach of ordinary people. Aimed at the general reader as well as the art aficionado, *Popular Indian Art* is a collector's item.

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